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Legislative
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Lundi
11 septembre 2017

Speaker: Honourable Dave Levac
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
Greffier : Todd Decker



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 September 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 septembre 2017

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Welcome back. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to join us in the singing of the Canadian national anthem.

Singing of O Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBER FOR SAULT STE. MARIE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Now that we're relatively settled, I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received from the Chief Electoral Officer and laid upon the table a certificate of the by-election in the electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): I have received a letter dated June 12, 2017, which reads as follows:

"A writ of election dated the 3rd day of May, 2017, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario and was addressed to Pauline Renaud, returning officer for the electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of David Oraziatti, who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Sault Ste. Marie on the 1st day of June, 2017, Ross Romano has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 9th day of June, 2017, which is now lodged of record in my office."

It is signed "Greg Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer."

Mr. Romano was escorted into the House by Mr. Brown and Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Ross Romano, member-elect for the electoral district of Sault Ste. Marie, who has taken the oath and has signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pray be seated.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER FOR TORONTO CENTRE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Mr. Glen Murray as the member for the electoral district of Toronto Centre, effective September 1, 2017.

Accordingly, I have issued my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to introduce today Bart and Kari Anne Cameron. They've made the trek from Wingham, Ontario, today. Bart is the CEO of Bruce Telecom, and Kari Anne is an amazing volunteer for the Wingham community and area. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm delighted to welcome Harvey Bischof, the president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, and Paul Kossta to the House this morning.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm very pleased to rise in the House today and to welcome all of Ontario's students back to school. Bonne rentrée scolaire. I know many of them watch question period.

I also would like to join in welcoming Harvey Bischof, the new president of OSSTF, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Congratulations and welcome to Queen's Park.

Finally, I'm very pleased to welcome the page from my great riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, Milind Patel, from Tredway Woodsworth Public School.

Welcome.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's an honour to be able to stand today on the first day of the Legislative session and to welcome to the legislature today page Duncan VanPagee, who attends Twenty Valley Public School from my riding. He'll be here for the next couple of weeks, and I want to welcome him to the Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to say that the page captain today is Emerson Manning from the great riding of Parkdale-High Park. His mother, Kirsten Tenebaum, and his grandmother Julia Manning are here in the members' gallery. Welcome, all, to Queen's Park.

1040

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce three great young people who are here from Oakville today. They've all worked in my constituency office at some point: Firoza Dodhi and Christien Rivard, and accompanying them today is Yara Salama. Please welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm also pleased to welcome to the Legislature Harvey Bischof and Paul Kossta from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome the family of page Adam Pariag. We have his parents, Rayanna and Jeffrey Pariag, and his sister Sarah.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome Dave Jenkins here from Belmont. Welcome, Dave.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I'd like to join with the member for Parkdale–High Park, because some of the grandparents of Emerson Manning are from St. Catharines: Anne Julia Manning, John Manning, Lori Tenebaum and Kirsten Tenebaum.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I'd like to welcome here to Queen's Park this morning my page, Olivia Groskleg, who is now the fourth Groskleg sister to serve as a page in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Olivia is from Jeanne-Lajoie school in Pembroke.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to welcome Chris Watson from CUPE back for this session, up here in the gallery.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome the following individuals from Queen's University: Mr. Daniel Woolf, the principal and vice-chancellor; Dr. Benoit-Antoine Bacon, the provost and vice-principal; Ms. Ann Tierney, vice-provost and dean of student affairs; Mr. Michael Fraser, vice-principal of university relations; Mr. Cam Yung, the rector; Mr. Craig Leroux, the associate director, government and institutional relations; Mr. Chris Armes, research analyst, government and institutional relations; student leaders Jennifer Li, Palmer Lockridge and Chelsea Hollidge; and, later today, Brandon Jamieson, Alannah Boisvert, Melinda Knox and Leigh Cameron.

I would also like to welcome everyone who is here—especially Tom Mikkelsen, who is the president and scientific director—from the Ontario Brain Institute. They have a reception in room 228 at 2:30.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? I have two. From the great riding of Brant, to support our page, Greg Bannister, his mom, Pat Bannister, will be here. She's here now. Thank you very much for being here, Pat.

Also in the Speaker's gallery—I was told that if you give me a hard time, don't give my wife a hard time, because my wife is in the gallery today. Thank you, Rosemarie.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Does she approve of the beard?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So far, I have permission.

Also with me are very dear friends of ours for many, many years, Harold and Margit Offenhammer. Thank you for joining us today. I appreciate it.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is therefore now time for question period—no, it's not. I read my notes, but I just—it's summer, you know. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to seek unanimous consent for all members in the Legislature to wear gold ribbon pins to recognize Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is seeking unanimous consent to wear ribbons. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will make an announcement after question period.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence before question period as a sign of this House's condolences for those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, 16 years ago today. On this date, we also want to hold in our thoughts and prayers all those who have lost their lives and were impacted by both terrorism and natural disasters around the globe this past summer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence to pay tribute to those who were mentioned in his motion. Do we agree? Agreed.

I would ask all members of the entire House to please rise to observe a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pray be seated.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Ontario families are working harder, paying more and getting less. But this summer, Hydro One applied for yet another rate increase, a rate increase that could cost Ontario families \$141 more per year. Will the Premier promise to stop yet another rate hike?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to start by welcoming all members back to the Legislature. I know how hard everyone works over the summer in their constituencies and I just want to acknowledge that, and to welcome everyone back to do this part of our job, in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite is very aware that people across the province saw a 25% reduction in their electricity bills this summer. He knows, as we do, that that makes it much fairer for people across the province, particularly people in rural and remote areas, who saw up to a 40% to 50% reduction.

The reality is that we are facing many challenges in this province, and we have a responsible and a fair plan to address those. The fair hydro plan is part of that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I asked the Premier a question about the proposed Hydro One rate hike, which is entirely in the government's power to stop. They've had 100-plus ministerial directives where they've been able to interfere and meddle in the energy market in Ontario. Now there's a rate increase of \$141 that Ontario families can't pay, and the Premier is saying nothing. The Premier is not going to stop it.

So I will ask again: Will the Premier do the right thing and stop this hydro rate hike?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of travelling the province this summer. All over the province, I was talking to folks and hearing from them about the changes that we are making. There are more than 180,000 young people in post-secondary today paying zero tuition because of the OSAP changes that we made. We have people in this province who have seen \$200 to \$300 reductions on their electricity bills because of our fair hydro plan. Across the province, residents have seen at least a 23% to 25% reduction on their electricity bills.

So we recognize that there are challenges that people are confronting. That's exactly why we have a fair hydro plan. That's exactly why we have reduced tuition and made it free for young people across the province. Those are the results that we're—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: I asked a question about the hydro rate hike and the Premier starts talking about tuition. Just for once it would be nice if the Premier answered the serious concerns that Ontario families have.

Here we have a \$141 hydro rate hike at a time when the government promised relief. What's unbelievable and disappointing is that at a time when they're trying to grab more money for hydro, Hydro One is about to pay \$6.7 billion for an American energy company. The Avista CEO said that this allows them to spread the cost burden out. Spread the cost burden out? Does that mean Ontario ratepayers would be subsidizing ratepayers in Washington and Montana?

1050

For a third time, maybe the Premier can say yes or no: Is she going to block that hydro rate hike?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Start the clock.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, the Leader of the Opposition knows that people have seen reductions on their electricity bills. He also knows that rate hikes are being held at inflation for the next four years—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Well, I guess I will. The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order—and the others.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fair hydro plan put in place an average 25% reduction for people across the province and, for four years, will hold any increases at inflation. So I would say to the Leader of the Opposition, who has not brought forward a plan in any way to deal with electricity prices, that this is a fair plan and it helps people across the province.

I would also say to the Leader of the Opposition that, on top of that, we have got in place programs to help people who are living on low income. He knows that in northern and rural communities, people are seeing a 40% to 50% reduction. That's making a difference—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

MINISTRY GRANTS

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I had hoped that I would have gotten a response on the hydro rate hike. Instead, I have the Premier say that they tie it to inflation. It has gone up 300% on their watch, and that's tied to inflation? Well, they don't want to talk about that. Let me try something else.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Yes or no? Does the Premier support her government's decision to give a \$4.9-million grant to the billion-dollar maker of the deadly drug OxyContin?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm trying to think of the best way to say, within the rules of parliamentary procedure, that the member is completely all wet with that question. That's the best way I can put it.

This government has never given any grant to any company, that I'm aware of, that would be going towards the development or the establishment or the building of OxyContin.

We do invest in research and development. That's one of the reasons, in this province, why we have an unemployment rate of 5.7%, the lowest unemployment rate seen in 60 years. It's because we make investments in R&D, we make investments in our bioscience sector and we make investments in ICT. We're going to continue to make those investments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: That was a pretty weak response, and probably why the Premier didn't want to respond herself.

Mr. Speaker, an internal government document from 2008 read, "Purdue Pharma Canada has been named in three class-action lawsuits across Canada over the last year or so, in connection with the OxyContin line of painkillers."

The note mentioned that "the company settled a \$600-million settlement in United States connected to OxyContin." But this government went ahead with the grant

and then tried to hide the deal from the public. This is their words; this is a government document.

Can the Premier herself truly justify funding a company that is partially responsible for the opioid crisis that Ontario is currently facing? Please don't pass it off. This is a very important issue to Ontario families.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let me be very, very clear: This grant went towards the construction of a 26,000-square-foot expansion to produce a manufacturing facility in Pickering. This funding supported a doubling of their R&D capacity in Ontario. The agreement specifically stated that Ontario's funding—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Please finish.

Hon. Brad Duguid: If the leader was being straight-up, he would know that this agreement specifically stated that Ontario's funding could not be used, directly or indirectly, for any work related to the OxyContin line of drugs. He's mixing and matching the investments that we make in research and development that that party has always opposed and that are contributing to the fact that we're leading the G7 in growth. We're going to continue to make those investments in our research and innovation ecosystem.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: This Liberal shell game is at work again. No matter what the money was earmarked for in the grant, the money was given to the maker of OxyContin—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Patrick Brown: —the drug responsible for countless addictions, overdoses and deaths, the drug that was the gateway to the opioid crisis in Ontario. Saying otherwise is just like telling the people of Ontario that the Liberals gave money to a cigarette company but the company isn't using the money to sell cigarettes. Their logic does not work. There are no ifs and buts about it. The Liberals funded the production and distribution of OxyContin—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Mr. Patrick Brown: —through this grant program, and it is unacceptable. The money—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. In case he didn't hear it, the Minister of Agriculture was asked to come to order. The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport was asked to come to order, and I'm now asking the Minister of Economic Development to come to order. I know how to play the game. I haven't forgotten, and I'll ramp it up if you want me to.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The government's own internal documents warned them what was going to happen. So my question is very direct, Mr. Speaker.

Once again to the Premier: Will the Premier apologize for her government's decision to fund the maker of OxyContin knowing full well its contribution to the opioid crisis in Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely shocked that the Leader of the Opposition—

Interjections.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm shocked because he knows well, and this has been in the public domain, that that grant had absolutely nothing to do with OxyContin. In fact, his party is entirely devoid of ideas, ideas that I've welcomed for more than a year because we have a public health crisis in the opioid crisis right now, and he takes his time to illustrate a story, to try to make a connection where he well knows there's no connection to be made.

We have invested almost \$300 million in the opioid crisis. The Premier, two weeks ago, met with a dozen front-line harm reduction workers. I met with that same group myself last week. We are providing naloxone across the country. We are providing rapid access to treatment. We have funded safe injection sites.

That party has had no ideas, except he's trying to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question, the leader of the third party.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The trial of two top Liberal operatives, including the Premier's deputy chief of staff, got under way last week in Sudbury, and it didn't take long for Ontarians to learn shocking new details about how far the Premier and her Liberal Party were willing to go to win the 2015 Sudbury by-election. It's alleged that the Minister of Energy demanded paid jobs for staff in exchange for running as the Liberal candidate in the by-election.

Can the Premier tell us right now, did she agree to this demand?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I've been very open with the Legislature; I've been open with the media and with the public about the allegations related to the Sudbury by-election.

As the leader of the third party knows, parliamentary privilege extends to all members and exempts a member from the normal obligation to attend court if summoned as a witness. I've said all along that I would be open and transparent and that I would work with the process, and that is exactly what I have been doing. Therefore, I will waive my parliamentary privilege. I will appear as a witness on September 13. The matter is before the courts, and we really need to let that process play out.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It appears from the evidence that the only reason the Minister of Energy himself has not been charged is because, under the law, it's illegal to offer a bribe, but not illegal to accept one. The minister

appears to be hiding behind a legal technicality, and the Premier appears to be encouraging him in—

Interjections.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Come to order, please.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When will the Premier show the kind of leadership that the people of this province expect, admit that there was wrongdoing in Sudbury and ask her minister to step down from cabinet?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think the leader of the third party and all members of this House know very well that this matter—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Second time, chief government whip.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this matter is before the courts as we speak, and it would be highly inappropriate for any one of us to engage in any conversation or speculation about that case. I urge all members to respect the rules of this House, to respect the independent legal process that is ongoing and to refrain from asking questions that could have an impact on that important case that is going on.

Miss Monique Taylor: You should give your Premier the same advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What is inappropriate is the shenanigans that went on in Sudbury. That's what's highly inappropriate.

Demanding jobs in exchange for running is a pretty serious allegation, and the Premier should take it seriously too. She should ask her Minister of Energy to step down from cabinet until this trial concludes, and it can be determined by the courts whether or not the minister was offered, or accepted, a bribe. Will the Premier ask her Minister of Energy to step down?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I believe it's worth repeating that this particular matter is before the courts. There are actually court proceedings that are ongoing, as we all know. It would be highly inappropriate for any one of us to engage in any speculation or commentary on that case, and we should respect that process. I urge all members to respect that process as closely as possible, to move on to issues that are important to the people of Ontario and to talk about issues that will improve the lives of Ontarians and build a fairer Ontario.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Time and time again, the Premier told Ontarians that there was nothing wrong with what happened in Sudbury, but last week, during the trial, we learned that while she was making those very assurances, she may

well have known that her Minister of Energy requested paid jobs for staff in order to run for her party.

Did the Premier authorize this quid pro quo in order to secure the minister's nomination for the Ontario Legislature?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, the leader of the third party knows the rules very well. I fully expect that she respects the rules, as well. Speaker, as you know very well, you and others in your role have clarified that when matters are before the courts, it is inappropriate to ask questions about those matters and inappropriate to answer questions about those matters.

In this particular instance, there is a court process that is ongoing as we speak, and it would be highly inappropriate for any member to engage in a line of questioning that could undermine that legal process. Therefore, Speaker, I urge all members to respect the rules of this House, to respect our independent judicial system and to refrain from asking questions that relate to this particular matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I find it unbelievable that the Liberals are lecturing the rest of us about the respecting of rules. When it comes to the Sudbury by-election, all we wanted was for the rules to be respected.

The Premier's former deputy chief of staff is accused of offering the Minister of Energy a bribe to run in the Sudbury by-election. That's not in sync with the rules on the way people are supposed to behave in this Legislature. We know from the testimony that the minister requested paid jobs for staff to run in the by-election. Did the Premier direct Ms. Sorbara to give in to the minister's demand, so that he would agree to be a Liberal candidate in the by-election?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, what's shocking and surprising is that the leader of the third party continues to play politics when there is actually a legal process that is ongoing. I think that's unacceptable. This House is not the court of law. This House is not the judge and the jury.

This House is here to represent the interests of the people of Ontario. This House is here to talk about things that are important to the people of Ontario. This House is not here to interfere in a legal proceeding that is going on. Again, I urge all members, including the member of the third party, to respect the trial that is ongoing, as we speak, in Sudbury.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It seems the only way to get the facts out of this Premier and her Liberal Party is to drag them through court.

When will this Premier stop hiding behind the trial, order her Minister of Energy to come clean about his role in the actual scandal and start answering Ontarians' questions about what went on, what she knew and when she knew it?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I will repeat my answer again, because I am going to follow and respect the rule: that is that this matter is before the courts and it would be highly

inappropriate to answer any questions relating to the case that is ongoing right now in Sudbury.

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Premier. The Ring of Fire is one of the greatest opportunities northern Ontario has ever seen. And yet, for 11 years since its discovery, the government has claimed that the north matters, but actions speak louder than words. All we've actually received is announcement after re-announcement—and always during an election year—but no actual progress to date.

Leading up to the 2014 election, they promised us \$1 billion, but then they axed it from this year's budget. Recently, the Premier made yet another election announcement, but they've already taken the money away, and they still haven't even bothered to speak to the federal government for help. It's just more of the same old story.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier just admit what we already know, that these announcements are nothing more than Liberal photo ops to win over voter support in an election year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me welcome the member to the Legislature. It's great to have you here, but I have to say that we probably need to offer you a technical briefing on the Ring of Fire file.

In fact, the \$1 billion is in place, and we have worked with the First Nations communities and with the mining companies very, very closely. We are now at a place where we actually have a framework agreement with all of the Matawa First Nations, and we have an agreement with three of the First Nations, with Webequie, with Nibinamik and with Marten Falls, to move ahead on building community roads. That will mean that the infrastructure that will be paid for by that billion dollars, in part at least, is in the budget, and we're moving ahead. That's a great success, and I look forward to seeing that infrastructure built.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary.

Mr. Ross Romano: Again to the Premier: I appreciate the lecture, but perhaps we can actually get an answer to this next question.

During these last 11 years of inaction on the Ring of Fire, this government has attributed the delay to promises that they were consulting with all of the impacted Matawa communities the right way and to ensuring that all five of those communities were on board with the development. Yet, in the Premier's recent development announcement, we learned that she has only obtained the support of three of the five communities.

Neskantaga and Eabametoong have publicly stated that they have not been properly consulted with and that they will oppose this development. How has the Premier failed to secure their support as previously promised and

how can the Premier possibly keep this year's election promise in the face of such opposition?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm pleased that the member opposite at least was told by his policy folks that there is an agreement with the three First Nations. That is a huge step forward.

1110

I have met with the nine—there are actually nine—Matawa First Nations repeatedly, with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. It's a complex issue; there is no doubt about it. There are competing interests within the nine groups. Those communities are looking for slightly different things in terms of the infrastructure build.

But it is important for all of us in this House to know that we will continue to work with all of those First Nations. The fact that we have an agreement with three does not preclude that we will continue to work with the rest. We will in fact continue to work with all of the other six First Nations. They know that. They have sat at the table with me. They know that we're going to work with them, and we will find a way to make sure that this development benefits all—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. The government is in court on a second matter today, with former Liberal staffers facing criminal charges related to the Liberal government's politically driven billion-dollar cancellation of two gas plants. The Premier rolled out a public inquiry into this matter. Then, on the same day that the public learned that the OPP had raided government offices, she shut down legislative hearings on the matter before hearing from two Liberal staffers, one of whom is in court today.

The Premier has done everything she can to prevent the public from learning the truth about her party's ruthless, self-serving culture. Why is it that the only way to get the truth out of this government is to haul them into court?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, perhaps I have the same advice for the member from the Danforth as I was suggesting to his leader: When it comes to matters before the courts, there is a very clear rule that is outlined in our standing orders, well established in all Parliaments, that it is not the place of this House to discuss those matters. They are properly before an independent court, which is independent from the House and the executive and the legislative branch of the government. It would be incumbent upon us to respect that process, so I urge the member opposite to do the same. It would be inappropriate, Speaker, to speak of those issues or to speculate about those issues in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: As a cabinet minister and campaign co-chair, the Premier went

along with gas plant cancellations that she should have known would cost over a billion dollars. Then, after becoming Premier, she admitted this was “a political decision.” She apologized, and then she shut down legislative hearings and told everyone to just move on. But instead of learning her lesson, the Premier doubled down and spent the next four years enacting the exact same sort of politically driven policies, from the hydro file to the transit file, all to serve the Liberal Party and not the people of Ontario.

When will the Premier stop abusing the trust of the people of Ontario and put the interest of the public ahead of the interests of the Liberal Party?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The members of the third party can ask the same question any which way. The advice remains the same, which is that this matter is before court and it would be highly inappropriate for anybody to engage in any conversation. The appropriate place for that is the courts, where these proceedings are taking place. So, Speaker, I will not be answering any question as it relates to this particular legal matter.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Education. In my riding of Kingston and the Islands, we've seen a significant investment in school infrastructure, including several new builds: most recently at St. Francis of Assisi, which opened its doors just this fall, and at Molly Brant Elementary School just last year. I would like to thank the government of Ontario for supporting the creation of new and innovative spaces that enhance student learning.

While it's important to invest in infrastructure, it's obviously critically important to invest in programs that nurture students. Our government is investing in new and expanded well-being programs for students across the province. Ontario is an international leader in education, thanks in large part to hard working educators and school staff. We always want to ensure that young people can reach their full potential and thrive inside and outside the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, what is the Ontario government doing to improve the well-being of students across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to the member from Kingston and the Islands for this question. Promoting well-being is one of the key pillars of our government's renewed vision for education in Ontario. Last year, we travelled across the province to hear from students, parents, guardians and education partners about what well-being means to them. We heard that student achievement is directly linked to well-being, and a safe and welcoming learning environment helps everyone succeed.

Students have said they want well-being from the front of the class to the back of the class, Mr. Speaker. That's

why just last week I announced that over the next three years we're investing \$49 million to focus on cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being for students. As we've begun this new school year, these new investments and initiatives will strengthen the well-being of all students in our schools. We know that students are better able to learn when they feel safe and welcomed at school and have the tools to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Minister. We are extremely proud of the investments made toward our government's renewed vision for education in Ontario. I also want to thank the minister for her advocacy and for her consultations that she's had all across the province in our schools. These investments are helping to improve and expand the well-being programs for all students. It is very important that our government continues to support well-being programs that enable young people to achieve their full potential.

Minister, can you please tell us more about what school boards can achieve with the additional funding announced for students' well-being?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, with this new funding, we are increasing investments in the School Mental Health ASSIST program from \$1 million to \$6 million over three years. The doubling of this program provides boards with tools and leadership and resources to support our students, increasing our support from \$6 million to \$12 million for local well-being priorities such as bullying prevention, peer mentorship programs and breakfast programs to help students thrive. By investing over \$6 million in new supports and programs to support staff well-being and violence prevention—something our education partners like OSSTF and others have asked for—we will continue to build our commitment to work towards a climate of health and safety in our schools.

As well, we're investing in active transportation, promoting more options for students to walk or wheel or cycle to school, and the investments are informing thousands of students in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Minister of Labour. This summer, I travelled across the province for committee hearings on Bill 148. From Thunder Bay to Ottawa, Windsor to Niagara, we heard from individuals and groups expressing their concerns about this legislation. The PC Party believes that the minimum wage should be raised in a responsible manner, and that includes conducting an independent—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Start the clock.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That includes conducting an independent economic analysis so that all parties fully understand the ramifications of enacting these significant labour changes. Regrettably, the government did the

wrong thing last month when they voted down our amendment to require such an analysis before Bill 148 comes into force.

Speaker, will the Minister of Labour correct this error and commit today to an economic impact analysis so all parties have the necessary information before these significant labour changes come into effect?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Labour?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you very much to the honourable member for the question. Speaker, it's not a surprising question. It's a topic of the day, obviously. But what I'm hearing is so disappointing. It's disappointing to the people in the province of Ontario because we know that that party has now come out and said it's against increasing the minimum wage in this province, and that is simply wrong. The leader has said he's not going to support a plan that is going to help so many families across this province.

There are people out there that are working 35 or 40 hours a week—more than that, Speaker—and they're not able to get by. We have been out and we've been consulting with these people; we heard from the same people. We cannot agree with that party any more in what they're saying. We don't believe anybody in this province that puts in a good day's work should not be able to pay their expenses, feed their family, buy clothes for their kids. That is so disappointing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West—Glanbrook will withdraw.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, you stand up and withdraw.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Back to the minister: Given your and your government's about-face regarding the \$15 minimum wage, it is perplexing to hear the minister refusing to get all the necessary information before enacting significant changes to employment standards and labour laws.

As recently as January 19 of this year, the minister said this about a \$15 minimum wage: "When you dig down a little deeper into the issue though, you realize it's got ramifications that go beyond that first initial political appeal. There is actually an awful lot of economic forces at play."

Speaker, we believe the minimum wage should be raised to \$15 in a responsible way, but given the fact that what the minister is saying now completely contradicts what he was saying earlier this year, what is the reason for not supporting our pragmatic amendment, beyond crass political calculations and trying to save the electoral fortunes of the sinking—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you again to the member for the supplementary.

You're either in favour of Bill 148 or you're opposed to Bill 148.

Speaker, Bill 148 will change the lives of ordinary working people in the province of Ontario. Who tells us that? The opposition parties can ignore the economic analysis from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. He can ignore the letter that came from 53 economists from across Canada. We had a fellow with the Royal Society of Canada, two former presidents of the Canadian Economics Association—one who used to consult for Jim Flaherty and the Conservatives. He can ignore the support of seven Nobel Prize-winning economists in the United States. Speaker, we have done our homework on this. We have gone out. We know that the best thing for people in the province of Ontario is to pass Bill 148.

They either support it or they oppose it. I'm hearing today that they oppose it.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Energy. The courts have heard testimony that the Minister of Energy demanded paid jobs for staff before he agreed to run in the Sudbury by-election for the Liberals. We want to know from the minister: Is this accurate?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Ministry of the Attorney General.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I guess—

Interjection.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Yes. The NDP continues to not follow the rules of this House and continues to ask questions that are before the courts. It would be highly inappropriate, as I said, for any member to answer any questions that are before the courts.

I again urge the members opposite, especially the NDP: Let's focus on issues that are important to the people of Ontario, like bringing their hydro rates down, like increasing their minimum wage to \$15 an hour and making sure that people are working in fair workplaces and have good jobs in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, to the Minister of Energy: Just because it's not illegal to accept a bribe doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Does the minister think it's appropriate for someone to accept a bribe just because there's no legal penalty for doing so?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this matter is before the courts, and it would be highly inappropriate to answer any of these questions here in the House.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Speaker, I spent the last few months in my riding of Kitchener Centre listening to many constituents.

There were many different conversations that we had, and I know that I'm not alone when I say that the one topic that was continuously raised was the plan to address inequality in the workplace. I heard this in my office. I heard this at the grocery store. I heard this at many public events that I attended.

I would agree with the minister in saying that people are working hard to put food on the table and to take care of their children but they're finding that the money is just running out before the end of the month. They're working a full 35 to 40 hours a week and they're still struggling to make ends meet.

Speaker, our economy is doing well, and while businesses are expanding and creating wealth, many workers are just not feeling it. Minister, what are you doing to help these workers and their families?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to my colleague from Kitchener for that important question. It's something we've all heard from families around our province in our ridings.

It's true that the Ontario economy is doing very well. We're leading the G7 in economic growth, manufacturing exports are up, and we've got the lowest unemployment rate we've seen in this province since 2001. But there are families who are working 35 and 40-plus hours a week. They're falling behind even while they are working hard. It's not right, and it needs to change.

That's why we're moving ahead with the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, Bill 148. It's going to bring transformative change to our province's workplaces. It's going to ensure workers across this province are paid a decent wage, a living wage, and that they're treated with dignity and respect. It's about doing what is right, what's fair and what's decent. We're building an Ontario where greater opportunity is available for everybody and decent pay is available for everybody.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I would like to thank the minister for his answer.

I was able to join my colleagues this summer on committee to hear feedback from Ontarians on this plan. Speaker, as you know, the committee travelled to 10 different cities. We heard from almost 200 Ontarians. In Kitchener Centre, we heard from workers, business owners, labour groups, poverty reduction advocates and many more. It was very clear—and I hope it's clear to members on the other side of the House who sat on this committee—that this legislation would have a profound impact on the lives of Ontarians, not only for people who are currently working for less than \$15 an hour, but for those who aren't given any notice of their work schedule, those who can't risk taking a day off when they're sick, those who are being paid less than their full-time counterparts, those who aren't afforded any time off to deal with difficult situations, and those who face intimidation when trying to organize.

Speaker, could the minister please tell us what he is doing to address these specific concerns?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member from Kitchener for that supplementary. It raises what I

think is an incredibly important point: The legislation is not just about the minimum wage. We're putting forward a plan that's going to provide wage equality, regardless of whether you're full-time, part-time or temporary; paid sick days, for the first time in the province of Ontario, for all workers; increasing the vacation time after five years; leaves, that were asked for by members of the opposition, for survivors of domestic and sexual violence; a more fair and transparent organization process; and they want to see a more robust enforcement in workplaces in the province.

Speaker, after a summer of dancing around the issue and having this opinion this day and that opinion the next day, the opposition has finally announced that they will be voting against it. That's disappointing to me, because they'll be voting against giving 30% of the people in this province a minimum, and living, wage.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Lorne Coe: To the Minister of Education: A recent social media post on the Ontario Autism Coalition's Facebook page showed that parents of a local school are asking for volunteers from the community to help with special-needs students in the classroom. Teachers, parents and students are desperate for more resources and supports for special-needs students. Speaker, this minister simply has not done enough, and parents are reaching out for help.

When will the minister stop ignoring the pleas of teachers and students, and put in place more special-needs resources and supports in Ontario schools?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I am a bit confused by the member opposite's question, given that he is the education critic and he knows full well that we have increased our support for special education in this province. We are supporting young people in ensuring that they get the help and the support that they need.

I want to actually tell the member opposite how we're supporting students with special education needs, because funding has increased to \$2.86 billion. It's a 76% increase since 2003.

We know that every student in our province deserves the access and the supports to be successful in school, including students with special education needs. Mr. Speaker, just in the recent Grants for Student Needs, we have provided additional funding so that there are more caring adults in schools—2,400 more caring adults in schools—to support all of our learners, and especially students with special education needs.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the Minister of Education: Minister, too little, too late.

Speaker, this is the state of special-needs education under the minister and the Liberal government: Because of the government's scandals, waste and mismanagement over the past 14 years, they can't afford to provide students and teachers with the special-needs resources

they desperately need. Parents and teachers are working harder, paying more and getting less under this government.

When will this minister finally take concrete action and support teachers and their students with special needs?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we've dramatically increased funding for special education, and we will continue to do so.

Let me tell you about one program, and that's what we're doing for students with autism. Our government is moving forward with an unprecedented investment in autism services. In 2016, we announced a historic \$500 million more to improve autism services in Ontario, including \$39 million for autism supports in schools. We're working very closely with my colleagues in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as they implement Ontario's autism program to provide families with more flexibility and individualized services. This school year, school boards are receiving more than \$2.86 billion—as I said, a 76% increase since 2003 in special education.

We've also invested \$77 million to strengthen our schools' capacity to improve the learning environment for students with special education needs. We're supporting—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'd like to remind the minister that when I stand, you sit, and it's because you're not addressing the Chair that you didn't know that I was standing.

New question.

ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. For the second time in less than a year, Windsor and Essex county residents have been hit by debilitating floods. Residents have experienced power outages and property damage. More than 5,000 basements were flooded. For the second time in 12 months, Windsor residents have had to rebuild and recover from this debilitating flood.

The Premier tweeted that she was ready to help, but we've really seen nothing. Municipal staff continue to be spread thin, desperately trying to keep up with the amount of debris that needs to be cleared. For the health and safety of our region, the people of Windsor and Essex need action now.

When will the Premier back up her tweets with action by making available all provincial resources without delay and unnecessary red tape?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member for the question. I will begin by thanking and congratulating and expressing our consideration for the first responders, for the municipal officials and for the volunteers who are on the ground again, for the second time in less than a year, and doing what they can to affect, as best as possible, the

situation that people find themselves in through no fault of their own.

What happened in Windsor-Tecumseh, Lakeshore, Amherst—there are six municipalities that were affected—is again unprecedented. We understand that this is becoming more normal, unfortunately, and we need to do everything that we can to prepare ourselves as best we are able, all across the province and all across the country, I would say.

I will more specifically address the member's question in the supplementary, but I would say that to imply in any way, shape or form that we have not responded is incorrect, and I'll provide some of that detail in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: We acknowledge that the minister has activated the disaster recovery assistance program, a program that has left people from last year still waiting for help. But this funding does not address the fact that municipal resources are wearing thin, and staff are being stretched to their limit. Garbage trucks cannot keep up with the volume of debris and are filling up after visiting only a handful of houses.

We know that the cleanup process would be expedited if this Liberal government would stop giving the city the runaround and allow garbage trucks from Michigan to cross the border in order to help. They keep passing the buck from ministry to ministry, leaving the municipalities to try to coordinate services themselves.

Speaker, we know the Premier is preoccupied with her testimony for the bribery scandal, but why is she letting this scandal get in the way of assisting the people of Windsor-Essex in their time of need?

Hon. Bill Mauro: In terms of people who are still waiting for assistance from last year, yes, from time to time when the program is activated, some people don't get the assistance as quickly as we would like. I would say most people get it very quickly. Sometimes we need receipts. We need complete applications before the support can be expedited to them.

In terms of the issue related to garbage trucks, this is the first—

Interjections.

Hon. Bill Mauro: In terms of the issue related to garbage trucks, this is the first time I've heard of that. I'm glad to listen to it if the member has anything to come to me in short order.

Speaker, this program was just reconstituted two years ago in consultation with AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. It had their support. It no longer requires local fundraising, and because of that significant change, the support to the people who need it can happen much quicker—now sometimes within weeks or months, rather than a much longer period of time.

It's a newly designed program. It offers support to low-income people for sewage backup. It's not intended to be a replacement for insurance, as has been suggested by some of the leaders of the opposition.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is for the minister responsible for early years and child care. I'm very proud that our government is committed to ensuring that families have access to quality and affordable child care in Ontario. In my own riding of Beaches–East York, I have many new and very young families who are starting to call east Toronto home, and they need good local daycare.

I've heard from so many families that there are just not enough spaces for child care that they can afford, and I want to ensure that we are providing child care options for these families. It was partially because of this shortage that I brought in my private member's bill which helped regulate daycare wait-list fees.

Can the minister responsible for early years and child care tell us what this government is doing to make sure that families' needs for new, affordable and safe daycare spaces are being properly met?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the hard-working member from Beaches–East York for this very important question. He is a strong advocate for his constituents on this issue.

Speaker, I have heard about the challenges families across the province face when it comes to finding quality, affordable child care, and I want to assure the member that our government is working hard every day to help Ontario families find more affordable, quality child care options. We are taking swift, strong action. That's why, in our 2017 budget, we announced an additional \$200 million to transform Ontario's child care system. This investment will help 24,000 more children access quality licensed care across the province.

I'm happy to tell the member from Beaches–East York that this investment in Toronto will see an additional \$34.5 million going towards child care in this city. That brings the total amount to \$368 million going to the city. This will help 3,880 new licensed child care spaces for children. Think about that. This funding will change lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you to the minister for that answer, and for the tireless work that she is doing on this file. It is very much appreciated by young families across the province. It's encouraging to know that the government is working to address the needs of Ontario families, but I recognize that there's a lot of work to be done, and families are keen to see how the system will be modernized.

Many parents are looking for child care options now. We know the province has committed to and announced 100,000 new spaces, but they're asking, "Where are these going to go?" In my riding of Beaches–East York, my office has worked very closely with the ministry to help facilitate new spaces in my riding, including the Blue Bell Academy, the Kingston Road Montessori school and also Centre 55, which has recently announced an application for 40 new spaces at the Ted Reeve arena.

Would the minister please let us know how the ministry is working to help all these institutions bring new child care spaces online?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to answer the member's question. It's a question I get asked often. In fact, last year we announced our commitment to give 100,000 more children access to licensed child care spaces over the next five years. It's a historic investment, and one that will benefit all Ontarians.

As part of this expansion, our government committed a massive \$1.6 billion in new capital funding, which will support the creation of 45,000 new spaces in publicly owned buildings across Ontario.

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We are well on our way. We've already received proposals for building new child care spaces in schools, and I'm happy to report that the number of submissions has exceeded expectations. That's amazing. That means child care spaces will now be coming to many schools all across the province. I am pleased to say there will be another round next year, and I encourage parents, families and child care providers to get in contact with their local service managers to see how they can get involved.

FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the finance minister. For years, this government has been presenting our Legislature with made-up finance numbers. Whether it was from the independent experts or the government's own confidential cabinet documents received in the gas plant scandal, it's been proven that the numbers they present to the public are simply made up to fit their story. Last week, the Financial Accountability Officer—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The members will lose their props shortly and actually get warned if they do it again.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You want to make an excuse? You know what I'm talking about, and you know you're not supposed to do that.

Carry on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Last week, the Financial Accountability Officer provided irrefutable evidence they were using "unlikely assumptions" for debt reduction claims. He projects a "steady deterioration in the budget deficit over the next five years." All of their made-up numbers don't come anywhere near historical numbers. It's only wishful thinking.

I would ask the minister, if he can't present the province's finances with integrity—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Minister of Finance?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Let me begin by thanking the Financial Accountability Officer for the work he does, and their department, recognizing their sensitivity analyses that they provide.

Every year, similar accusations are made by the member opposite, and every year, we exceed our targets. Every year, we exceed our targets, and public accounts reaffirms that. We beat our deficit by \$3.3 billion this year. We are the leading jurisdiction in North America when it comes to economic growth. Our unemployment rate is at 5.7%. We're on track to balance the budget—as we said we would—this year, next year and the year after that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the finance minister: As if the blistering commentary from the FAO wasn't enough, the Auditor General has now weighed in. She said that this government's annual deficit is understated, net debt is understated and accumulated debt is understated. We're not talking nickels and dimes here. The auditor says that our deficit is \$1.5 billion more and our net debt is \$12.5 billion more than reported. For the second year in a row, the auditor has said, "Based on the ... evidence ... the statements are significantly misstated."

Both of the legislative officers have told us that this government's numbers can't be trusted. I ask the minister: Why does it always take the Financial Accountability Officer, the Auditor General or the OPP to get to the truth in Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Investors around the world are investing in Ontario for a reason. They recognize that Ontario's economy is growing. They're recognizing that our fiscally responsible approach to growing the economy, investing in things that matter, is working. And our plan is working. We're borrowing \$30 billion less than we had anticipated. Our net debt to GDP is lower now than was anticipated and is tracking to go further down.

As we produce and as we move forward, we're taking every necessary step to grow the economy. And as we grow the economy, it enables us to source more opportunity to invest in things that matter to Ontarians, things that that member and his party opposite have voted against. They voted against providing more free tuition for our students. They voted against the very nature of trying to provide extended pharmacare for every young person under 25. These are the reasons we're able to do that: because we've balanced the budget and we're taking the steps necessary to invest in infrastructure. That makes us competitive and enables us to balance the books all the while.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Premier. I spent the weekend at community events in and around Sudbury and Nickel Belt. Everywhere I went, people were lining up to talk to me about the bribery trial. The good people of Sudbury are ashamed of the three-ring circus that the Premier has created in our hometown with the bribery scandal.

The Premier needs to stop hiding behind legal technicalities and take responsibility for her actions and the actions of her staff and party members. What will it

take for the Premier to realize that the longer she hides behind technicalities, the less the people of Sudbury—and the people all over Ontario, for that matter—can trust her and her Liberal government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this matter is before the court. It would be inappropriate to answer any questions relating to this matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: Time and time again, the Premier has said that there was nothing wrong—nothing wrong went on in Sudbury—and that it was all business as usual. But it was not, Speaker. It took only a day of testimony in the bribery trial to find out more shocking information about the lengths to which the Premier was willing to go to win back Sudbury.

Speaker, can she not see the damage that she is doing to all of us, the damage that she is doing to our democratic institutions, and the damage she's doing to the Legislative Assembly and the processes that go on in here?

Doesn't the Premier think that the people of Ontario deserve to learn the truth from her, to learn the truth from their Premier?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The people of Sudbury know that this matter is before the court, and the people of Sudbury very much respect the judicial process and the independence of that process. It would be highly inappropriate for anyone in this House to speak to these issues, given that the court case is ongoing as we speak.

PHARMACARE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This summer, I have been in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South, talking to my constituents about what matters most to them. One of the top topics in these conversations was health care, and specifically pharmacare.

Our government believes that having access to necessary prescription medications is critically important in this province. That is why I'm proud that our government has taken a major leap towards establishing a provincial pharmacare program for children and youth.

Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform this House of the historic investments our government is making in Ontario's children and youth?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Unlike the member from Nickel Belt, the lines of people waiting to see me across the province are, quite frankly, families, individuals and young people who want to ask me about OHIP+, our pharmacare program that we're rolling out on January 1.

I want to tell everybody that we are on track, we'll be on time, and it's remarkable—access for every Ontarian with a health number, an OHIP number, to more than 4,400 medications, absolutely—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's more than 4,400 medications, absolutely free of charge—no copayment, no annual deductible, no upfront costs. That will be for asthma drugs; it will be for drugs to treat epilepsy; it will be for drugs to treat HIV, rare diseases, cancer, skin conditions, ear infections, the works.

We're all very proud, on this side of the Legislature, of a program that is going to have a dramatic effect for four million Ontarians, beginning January 1.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, on a point of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Speaker can always do other things. Just because question period is over doesn't mean he doesn't have his authority anymore—and I'll use it.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, on a point of order.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to invite all members of the Legislature to join us immediately following question period for a photo on the staircase to help raise awareness for childhood cancer. We'll be joined by advocates, families and doctors.

I want to do a special shout-out to Neal Rourke for his leadership on this very important cause.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: A point of order: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct my record. In an answer to the question from the member for Sault Ste. Marie, I indicated that there were three First Nations that were working with the government on the Ring of Fire. In fact, I neglected to say that late last week, Aroland, another First Nation, actually indicated that they are interested in working with us. So there are four.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on a point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I wanted to welcome Michael Horgan today to the Legislature. He is a former Deputy Minister of Finance in Ottawa and is with the Ontario Brain Institute.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Kingston and the Islands?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome to the Legislature my executive assistant, Jaclynne Hamel, as well as Anna Majetic, who is my new LA and also a graduate of the MBA program at Queen's University. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Two quick points as reminders: I know it's hard not to do, but we put five minutes on the clock for introductions. I try to cover all of the introductions. If you know they're coming in later,

just introduce them during that time period and let people know that they're going to be joining us later in the day.

The second thing is, when you correct your record, it has to be—there's minutiae here. It wasn't a correction of the record, actually; it was an addition to. So we have to leave it at that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, okay.

Interjection: Are you challenging the Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, I don't—she knows better.

Therefore, question period is over. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to announce a number of guests who are here to support Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, starting with Neal Rourke, international childhood cancer advocate, Coalition Against Childhood Cancer and Advocacy for Canadian Childhood Oncology Research Network member and proud member of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound; Dr. Corin Greenberg, Dr. Mark Greenberg and their son, Dr. Joshua Greenberg—Dr. Corin is the founder of POGO, the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, and I'm pleased to have her here; Dr. Cynthia Hawkins; Amrita Naipaul; Natalie Meyer; Francis Macapagal; Malvika Arun; Sarah Khan; Lena Soje; Kim Daffern; Dave Jenkins; Jenn Davies; Mike Strange; Tracey Jones; Renee Simmons; Stephanie Simmons; Dean Simmons; Denise Bebenek; Justine Mallah; Suzi Kuczynski; Tara Lupa; Sunny Hayer; Michelle DaCosta; Sarah Grace Bebenek; Emily Brown; Deborah Potts; Agnes Potts; Kim Doron; Ori Doron; and Evan Jenkins.

Mr. Speaker, I'll provide the list, because they're all associated with various organizations supporting childhood cancer, and I will ask that they put that in Hansard, for the sake of time and for your benefit. Thank you so much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You got a brownie point for that one. That's good.

Further introductions? The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to pay a special welcome to some guests who have joined us today from London: Dean and Renee Simmons, and their daughter Stephanie, who are with Childcan in London, and also Tracey Jones from the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Fabulous. Welcome.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd like to recognize two constituents from my riding who are here today: Agnes Potts is visiting the Legislature today with her granddaughter Emily for the recognition of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. Emily is being recognized for her fight

against leukemia. Agnes is well known in our community. She's a former trustee, former citizenship judge, former Etobicoke councillor and former candidate for MPP in Etobicoke. I welcome them both to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's my pleasure to welcome, in the east gallery today, Kim Gavine from Conservation Ontario, and Dick Hibma, also from Conservation Ontario. Thanks for joining us today.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Speaker, I just want to welcome my cousin Agnes Potts to the House. We used to be down at city hall together. Although we're not related directly, I'm delighted to see you here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Your cousin that's not directly related? I want that checked in Hansard for sure.

I personally want to thank the members and those with childhood cancer issues for being here as well. I work with my good friend the Speaker of the New Brunswick Legislature, Chris Collins, who actually rode his bike across Canada in his desire to help with childhood cancer issues. I thank the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for bringing that here to Ontario, and Mr. Rourke for being here as well.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to implement 2017 Budget measures / Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2017.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I also beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the following documents were tabled:

—the 2016 annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario;

—the 2015-16 annual report of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario;

—the 2016-17 annual report of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario;

—the 2016-17 annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario;

—the 2016-17 annual report of the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario;

—the 2016-17 Annual Energy Conservation Progress Report, Volume Two, from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario;

—the report from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario concerning the review of expense

claims under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002, for submissions received in April 2017 and complete as of May 31, 2017; and

—the report from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario concerning the review of expense claims under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002, for submissions received in May 2017 and complete as of June 23, 2017.

I also beg to inform the House that, in accordance with section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act, the name of the following person appointed to serve on the Board of Internal Economy has been communicated to me as chair of the Board of Internal Economy: Arthur Potts, MPP, is appointed by the caucus of the government in the place of Peter Milczyn, MPP.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GROVES MEMORIAL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Ted Arnott: It is a distinct privilege to rise in this House on the first day of the fall sitting, after a busy and productive summer season in Wellington-Halton Hills. Like most members of this House, in recent months I've had countless meetings and also had the opportunity to attend numerous community events and celebrations in our riding.

One of those events was approximately 15 years in the making. On August 9, we gathered to officially turn the ground on our new Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of Centre Wellington. The beginning of the construction of our new hospital is the culmination of an extraordinary community effort. We have worked together, building the future of primary health care for our residents. I believe that our efforts are a shining example of innovation, collaboration and partnership.

Once again, I want to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues in local government: successive councils and staff at the township of Centre Wellington and councils and staff at the county of Wellington for their vision and leadership. We acknowledge the government of Ontario and thank the staff at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Infrastructure Ontario and the Waterloo Wellington LHIN.

But our deepest expression of gratitude must be extended to the Groves hospital staff and volunteers, the board, the foundation, our donors and indeed the entire community—everyone in the hospital's catchment area—for their hard work, patience, persistence and generosity. I was glad to work with them over the years and support them every step of the way.

We look forward to the day, now about two years away, when our new hospital is completed and our community finally has the new, modern, state-of-the-art hospital that we have earned.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This summer, I met with the board chairs of seven London-area agencies that provide vital mental health services for children and youth, who shared urgent concerns about the crisis in children and youth mental health created by years of chronic underfunding. Each month, the boards of these agencies—which include Vanier, Ways, Craigwood, Merrymount, Anago and London Family Court Clinic—are not only forced to consider service cuts, but whether they can continue to keep their doors open.

Over the last 25 years, these agencies have received only two modest increases in base funding—no increases under the Conservatives and no increases under the Liberals since 2006—in the face of a 53% rise in the cost of living and an alarming spike in demand. In the last two years alone, London saw a 23% increase in children's mental health crisis intake, with almost one quarter of these young people planning or attempting suicide.

Ongoing funding shortfalls have led to unacceptably long waits for treatment, with the police or the hospital filling the gap. In 2016, London police dealt with almost 500 incidents related to youth mental health—more than double the number from 2010—and 61% of London youth entering a community-based treatment program for the first time had been admitted to hospital at least twice before.

I have yet to receive a response from the Premier to the letter I sent her in June about this crisis. Londoners deserve a government that puts the mental needs of children first.

RICK SOWIETA

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say a few words in memory of a constituent of mine, Rick Sowieta. Rick passed away on August 26 after a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer.

Rick came to Canada as a small boy with his family, and they settled in the heart of Ottawa. Football became his passion. He played locally—college ball with the University of Richmond Spiders—and began his professional career with the Toronto Argonauts and returned to play for the Ottawa Rough Riders for eight years as number 75. He was a tough and competitive linebacker.

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Rick had a passion for food as well, and opened Rick's Cantina after his football career. Rick's famous salsa was a staple in our family for many years, and it's still the standard by which we measure all salsas.

Rick coached many minor and high school football teams, building character and skills in many young players. He was a true fighter, and became involved in raising the awareness of pancreatic cancer.

Most importantly, Rick was a husband, a father and a true friend to many. A kind and gentle person, he listened well and always showed a genuine interest. I think that's

why my late father found a kindred spirit in him. Rick's few words were always well chosen and thoughtful.

To Jenny and the family and to all of his friends, may you all find comfort in knowing that the world is a better place for Rick Sowieta having been in it.

CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Bill Walker: September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. I, along with my colleagues, am proudly wearing a gold ribbon to express support for the children and families affected by the tremendous hardship of life-threatening illnesses.

It's essential to highlight the severity of cancer and its impact on the lives of children and their families, and how we may strive to continue to fight and advocate for an end to the suffering it causes.

Currently, cancer is the second-leading cause of death among kids in Canada. Although rare among children in comparison to adults, the lingering effects of diagnosis, treatment and recovery can last a lifetime. That's why the fight against childhood cancer should never be fought alone.

We wear the gold ribbon pin today in recognition and support of the families and children who are forced to battle life-threatening illnesses, to show that we stand in solidarity with them in their fight.

One in 330 children will be diagnosed with some form of cancer by the time they are 20 years old. This staggering statistic was the key factor in the creation of POGO, the Pediatric Oncology Group of Ontario, founded by Dr. Greenberg, who is with us today in the members' gallery.

Dr. Greenberg's tireless advocacy and research led to the expansion of the province-wide registry of childhood cancer to include standardized, wide-ranging information on an entire patient population and critical dimensions of their care. With input from the five pediatric oncology treatment programs in Ontario, this resource now produces much of the information required for planning pediatric cancer care. It's one of the few such databases in existence.

Let us be reminded that while there are health care professionals such as Dr. Greenberg who have dedicated their lives to this fight, to saving and improving the lives of children with cancer, we need to continue to do more to illustrate our solidarity. The fight to end childhood cancer must never be fought alone, and the month of September, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, is a stark reminder of that commitment.

I ask all of us to continue to fight and take action to build a world free from these life-threatening illnesses. It is my hope that we will soon—for the dream of my hero, Terry Fox—find a cure for all cancers: "Somewhere the hurting must stop."

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: As MPP for London—Fanshawe, I am proud to speak to the terrible racist

incidents that have taken place most recently in Charlottesville and the horrific Quebec mosque shootings.

Racism, bigotry and discrimination continue to be among the greatest challenges we face in Ontario. That is why it is crucial that we continue to build on the progress we have made. Our work is not done.

The NDP pushed the government to reintroduce an Anti-Racism Directorate, and I was honoured to introduce a motion declaring October Islamic Heritage Month.

In August, an anti-Islam group rallied a few dozen people outside London's city hall to spread their message of hate and intolerance. Hundreds of Londoners responded by rallying together and making it clear that there is no place for any form of bigotry or discrimination in our city.

In my riding of London—Fanshawe, my office has started a working group dedicated to ending the insidious racism that persists in our lives. Together, we started an “end racism” pledge to root out systemic racial discrimination, to acknowledge our prejudices and privilege, and to call out racism whenever we encounter it.

Written by leaders of diverse communities, the pledge is just one example of the important work that is being done in London. But we must continue to take a stand against racism, to listen first and understand the perspectives of those who experience racism daily, to educate one another and to enact an anti-oppression framework through legislation.

All of us together need to continue to work to end racism.

UKRAINIAN HERITAGE DAY

Mr. Yvan Baker: The first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, Vasyl Eleniak and Ivan Pylypiw, arrived in Canada 126 years ago, on September 7, 1891. Since then, many Ukrainians have left their homeland to flee oppression, to find freedom and to find a better life. Many have found that life here in Ontario.

My grandparents and my mother were some of those people. They and so many others in the community will always be grateful to Ontario and to Canada for that. In fact, that's why, as proud as my grandparents were of their Ukrainian heritage, they often said that they were the proudest Canadians that they ever knew. They're certainly the proudest Canadians that I've ever known.

At same time, Speaker, Ukrainians living here in Ontario have made important contributions to our province and to our country. They have contributed to our economic, social, cultural and political life and have helped make Canada the great country that it is today. For these reasons, in 2011 this Legislature unanimously passed a bill proclaiming Ukrainian Heritage Day on September 7 of every year. I was honoured to have worked with members on all sides of this Legislature on this bill.

I am also proud of the work that our government has done with Ontario's Ukrainian Canadian community. We've included the internment of Ukrainian Canadians

and the Holodomor in Ontario's curriculum. We have provided funding for the Holodomor mobile classroom that will teach children across Ontario about the Holodomor, and our government has stood in support of Ukraine sovereignty and territorial integrity and has condemned Russia's occupation of Ukraine.

Today, Speaker, I am proud: proud of my Ukrainian heritage, proud of the work our government has done with the community, and proud of the contributions that the community has made to Ontario and to Canada. Happy Ukrainian Heritage Day.

JEREMY FRITZ

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm excited today to offer congratulations to an athlete from my riding who is a real hometown hero. Jeremy Fritz, a native of Florence, Ontario, has been wrestling professionally under the ring name Eric Young for almost 20 years. Jeremy, as Eric Young, first made a splash in 2004 when he debuted in TNA. He then went on to capture the TNA World Heavyweight Championship, an X-Division Championship, three TNA King of the Mountain Championships, and an incredible four tag-team championships. Altogether, he won 11 championships in TNA before finally achieving his dream and signing with the WWE in April of 2016.

Now wrestling in WWE's NXT brand as part of a mysterious faction called Sanity, Jeremy's Eric Young persona continues to bring excitement and pride to WWE fans in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex and across Canada.

His most recent victory came on August 19 at NXT TakeOver: Brooklyn III when he and fellow Sanity member Alexander Wolfe bested the formerly undefeated Authors of Pain to capture the prestigious NXT Tag Team Championships.

Speaker, I congratulate Jeremy on his thrilling victory in Brooklyn, and I look forward to seeing many more great matches from him and NXT as a member of Sanity.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I am thrilled to host the faculty, staff and students from Queen's University, in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, for their Queen's Park day.

Queen's is an integral part of the fabric of Kingston, and the campus and community are deeply intertwined. An impressive \$1.5 billion in annual economic activity is created through Queen's, along with countless hours of community service. By fourth year, 60% of students have participated in community service or volunteer activity, and nearly a third have participated in community-based projects. Just the other week, I attended a gala fundraiser for the Saint Vincent de Paul association in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. The students raised an astounding \$20,000, approximately. Now, that's community.

Queen's is a key driver of the eastern Ontario innovation ecosystem, making massive economic contributions to this province. With Innovation Park, the Dunin-Deshpande Queen's Innovation Centre, and numerous

partnerships between Queen's researchers and industry, they are also a significant contributor to Ontario's highly skilled workforce. Queen's students and faculty are making phenomenal contributions to society with successful commercial innovative ventures such as BKIN Technologies, Laser Depth Dynamics, GreenCentre Canada and Enviro Innovate, and the list goes on.

Through the work of Nobel laureate Art McDonald, Queen's is responsible for changing the very way that we look at and understand the world through his work with neutrinos. Does it get any better than that?

I am delighted to welcome Queen's University to celebrate its impact on the province and on the riding that I am so proud to serve.

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I rise today to highlight suicide prevention day, which was just held yesterday, September 10. Suicide prevention day has been recognized for the last 14 years, with the first taking place in September 2003 by the International Association for Suicide Prevention. This year focuses on the theme of, "Take a minute, change a life."

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It is crucial for members of our communities to look out for and connect with those who are struggling. A word of encouragement or taking the time to listen could make all the difference in someone's life.

Those who are suffering often say that they just wanted someone to intervene and ask them whether or not they were okay. Yet, all too often, family and loved ones are reluctant to intervene, even when they are seriously concerned about a loved one. This can sometimes be attributed to not knowing what to say or how to properly address the situation. I would encourage all those who know someone that they are concerned about to reach out and let them know that there are those who care about them and those who can help.

Suicide affects all ages, ethnicities and people of all socio-economic standings. Each day in Canada, 11 people end their lives and 210 make a suicide attempt. We as a society must end the stigma associated with mental health and encourage those who are feeling suicidal to come forward and seek help and those who suspect someone of struggling to take a minute to reach out and offer support.

There is more the government can do to support mental health and prevent suicide. Our communities have lost too many people.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, during the adjournment, the Clerk received reports on intended appointments dated June 6, 2017, and

August 10, 2017, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), these reports are deemed to be adopted by the House.

Reports deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 148, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and the Labour Relations Act, 1995 and to make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 148, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi et la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 74(b), the bill is therefore ordered for second reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MINISTRY OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ MENTALE ET DES DÉPENDANCES

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 149, An Act to establish the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions / Projet de loi 149, Loi créant le ministère de la Santé mentale et des dépendances.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It will be very short, Speaker. The bill establishes the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. The functions and duties of the minister are set out in section 4 of the bill.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion

without notice regarding changes to the membership of standing committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Minister.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

That, on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Mr. Colle replaces Mr. Milczyn; and

That, on the Standing Committee on Estimates, Mr. Colle replaces Mr. Delaney, Ms. Hoggarth replaces Mr. Dickson, and Madame Des Rosiers replaces Mr. Milczyn; and

That, on the Standing Committee on General Government, Mr. Fraser replaces Mr. Colle, Ms. Wong replaces Madame Des Rosiers, and Mr. Rinaldi replaces Ms. Hoggarth; and

That, on the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Ms. Mangat replaces Mr. Colle, and Mr. Romano replaces Mr. Walker; and

That, on the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Ms. Malhi replaces Mr. Fraser, Mr. Dickson replaces Mrs. Mangat and Mr. Delaney replaces Mr. Rinaldi; and

That, on the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mr. Berardinetti replaces Mrs. Mangat; and

That, on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mrs. Mangat replaces Ms. Malhi; and

That, on the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, Mr. Anderson replaces Mr. Berardinetti and Mr. Bradley replaces Ms. Wong.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Madame Lalonde moves that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Madame Lalonde.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(c), a change be made to the order of precedence on the ballot list draw of September 8, 2016, for private members' public business, such that Madame Gélinas assumes ballot item number 64 and Ms. Horwath assumes ballot item number 71; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 71 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Madame Lalonde moves that, notwithstanding standing order—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FIREFIGHTERS' NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY

JOUR COMMÉMORATIF NATIONAL DES POMPIERS

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: It is a pleasure to rise in this Legislature to mark the first-ever Firefighters' National Memorial Day and recognize those who sacrificed their lives while protecting families, homes and communities across Ontario.

J'ai l'immense plaisir de prendre la parole devant cette Assemblée pour marquer le tout premier Jour commémoratif national des pompiers et rendre hommage à ceux qui ont sacrifié leur vie pour protéger les familles, les foyers et les collectivités de l'Ontario.

Sixteen years ago, the world changed forever. Today we remember those who lost their lives on 9/11 and the families they left behind. We remember the firefighters and first responders who ran into the buildings while everyone else was running out. Every day, firefighters put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe. They provide emergency and life-saving services when we need them most. They look after us in our time of need.

It's easy to take our safety for granted. We are fortunate to live in a place where our trust can be firmly placed in the hands of the dedicated people who risk their lives to keep us safe. We take comfort in the fact that Ontario's firefighters are ready at a moment's notice to protect our homes, our businesses and our loved ones.

Firefighters have proven time and time again that they play an essential role in responding to emergencies on the front lines and help to lessen the impact of disasters. I and the people of Ontario are grateful.

Je me joins aux citoyennes et citoyens de l'Ontario pour leur exprimer toute ma gratitude.

September 10 was recently declared Firefighters' National Memorial Day. This day serves as an important reminder of the personal sacrifice those men and women have made to keep our families safe. Today, we honour their bravery, commitment and dedication. Our communities are stronger under their watch.

This day also reminds us that the work of a firefighter is no ordinary job. In protecting our communities, firefighters face danger on a daily basis and see things that, thankfully, many of us will never see or experience.

It is one of the reasons why this profession is among the most respected in our society.

1330

I would like to thank Ontario's dedicated firefighters for the challenges they take on and the excellent work they do on our behalf. From educating the public about the importance of fire and carbon monoxide safety, to responding to emergency calls on the front line with their partner first responders, the work they do is essential in our communities.

Speaker, I encourage all members to use this week to say hello to your local firefighters and to show your gratitude for their tireless efforts to build safer communities across the province.

As I'm encouraging members to say hello, I would like to recognize Mark Train, the executive vice-president of the Ontario Professional Firefighter's Association, who is in our members' gallery. Thank you, Mark.

Au nom de la première ministre Kathleen Wynne, de notre gouvernement et de tous les citoyens de l'Ontario, je rends hommage aux pompiers de l'Ontario pour leur courage, leur engagement et leur service auprès de la population ontarienne.

On behalf of Premier Kathleen Wynne, our entire government and the people of Ontario, I want to recognize Ontario's firefighters for their courage, commitment and service to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries.

Therefore, it is now time for responses.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to have this opportunity to honour all fallen firefighters across this country. They are truly national heroes.

I would like to begin by recognizing the hard work of the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation to create an official day of remembrance. It is thanks to their efforts that, starting this year, the federal government has designated the second Sunday in September as Firefighters' National Memorial Day.

It is fitting that we mark this occasion today, on September 11, when so many firefighters lost their lives during the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

Speaker, the image of a fire truck rushing by is something we can all relate to. In fact, it is so common that perhaps many of us don't give it a second thought. Yet every time firefighters respond to an emergency, they take on tremendous risk. These men and women leave the fire hall knowing that they might have to put their lives in harm's way to protect us. Since 1848, more than 1,300 firefighters have lost their lives doing just that. This year alone, 13 individuals have fallen in the line of duty.

The vast majority of firefighters in Canada are volunteers. They run local businesses; they're coaches of local sports teams; they're mothers and fathers. At the same time, they are the ones we count on most in emergencies.

Just down the street from Queen's Park sits the fallen firefighters' memorial, on the northeast corner of College Street. I would encourage everyone to visit this beautiful monument sometime this week.

Among the names inscribed on the stone are two fallen firefighters who I share a personal connection with: Ray Walter and Ken Rea. On March 17, 2011, both men tragically lost their lives battling a fire at a dollar store in Listowel. The roof of the building collapsed while they were inside.

Ken was 56 years old and served as deputy district fire chief at the Atwood station. Ray was 30 and had joined the fire department in 2008.

I was in town that day with Tim Hudak, and I remember seeing the thick black smoke. There were rumours that someone had been hurt or killed in the fire. An investigation followed, and as it turned out, the roof of the dollar store building had been made with volatile lightweight wood trusses.

This tragedy was the motivation behind a private member's bill that I tabled last spring, the Rea and Walter Act. It would require that all buildings using truss and lightweight construction display a decal to warn firefighters.

The day the bill received second reading, we had about 40 people from Perth-Wellington and the surrounding areas attend. Many were active and retired firefighters, in addition to Ken and Ray's families. It was a great moment when the Rea and Walter Act passed with unanimous support.

Firefighter safety is our shared responsibility as lawmakers. There is perhaps no greater way to honour the sacrifices of fallen firefighters than to prevent future tragedies. I would encourage the government to make the Rea and Walter Act a priority in this legislative session.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is my honour to rise today on behalf of my leader, Andrea Horwath, and my Ontario NDP colleagues to commemorate the first Firefighters' National Memorial Day.

I'd also like to welcome Mark Train, vice-president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighter's Association, who has joined us here today.

I'd like to take a moment to offer our continued heartfelt condolences and fellowship with the incredibly brave first responders who lost their lives or suffered great personal loss 16 years ago when the World Trade Center was attacked. Ontarians stand in solidarity with the people of New York and with the members of the New York fire department who bore such a tremendously heavy burden in their attempt to rescue thousands of people during that horrific event.

Closer to home, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the firefighters who courageously battled the wildfires which consumed Fort McMurray last year. I know that Albertans and all Canadians want to acknowledge and thank you for your service.

Speaker, it really is the best part of my job and all of our jobs here in the Legislature to stand up and pay honour to people in our communities and all commun-

ities who selflessly give of themselves to support their neighbours. I know that right now in every corner of Ontario and Canada there are men and women rushing to answer an alarm or knocking down a structure fire or searching in blinding smoke and searing heat for victims of fire, motor vehicle accidents and all manners of tragedy that people find themselves in. This work goes on every day, and we are so fortunate to have the very best among us waiting to answer those alarms, ready and willing to go where the rest of us flee from. To put it simply, these men and women protect us. New Democrats believe that here in this place it is our job to protect them. Our words of honour are appropriate, but we have a much greater responsibility to provide the legislative framework which provides our firefighters with assurances that they will be able to do their jobs with the most up-to-date training, with state-of-the-art firefighting equipment and personal protective equipment. We also have a duty to make sure that when a firefighter is injured or afflicted with an occupational illness or disease, we are there for them, to support them both personally and financially so that they may continue to support their families.

I also want to thank our firefighters for all the contributions that they make outside of the fire hall. Many kids in my region have a much better Christmas thanks to Sparky's toy drive, and families appreciate the work that our firefighters do in support of Goodfellows.

It's also important to note that on October 1, firefighters and their families will meet here at the firefighters' memorial to once again remember fallen firefighters and to add another 55 names to the memorial, bringing the total to 736 names who now and forever will be remembered for their sacrifice in the name of public safety. From my part of the province, Kenneth Racine and Jack Lodge will be honoured.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to each and every firefighter and civilian staff who keep our fire departments ready to respond at a moment's notice for giving us all peace of mind to know that you will be there for us in our time of need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's 627 long-term-care homes play a critical role in the support and care for more than 100,000 elderly Ontarians each and every year;

"Whereas nine out of 10 residents in long-term care today have some form of cognitive impairment, along with other complex medical needs, and require specialized, in-home supports to manage their complex needs;

"Whereas each and every year, 20,000 Ontarians remain on the waiting list for long-term care services and yet, despite this, no new beds are being added to the system;

"Whereas over 40% of Ontario's long-term-care beds require significant renovations or to be rebuilt and the current program put forward to renew them has had limited success;

"Whereas long-term-care homes require stable and predictable funding each year to support the needs of residents entrusted in their care;

"We, the undersigned, citizens of Ontario, call on the government to support the Ontario Long Term Care Association's Building Better Long-Term Care pre-budget submission and ensure better seniors' care through a commitment to improve long-term care."

I fully support it, affix my name and send it with page Duncan.

1340

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to start by thanking Sherry Caldwell from the Ontario Disability Coalition for working so hard in bringing this petition to my attention. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we need you to break down the barriers that are depriving many children and youth with all disabilities access to ongoing and continuous therapy to improve their quality of life to promote their independence;

"Whereas children and youth with all disabilities should be able to access quality therapy that is parent/caregiver directed. All children and youth with disabilities must have access to needed hands-on therapy such as physiotherapy, occupational, speech and language, augmentative communication and vision therapy;

"Whereas parents should be able to purchase therapy through a direct-funding model;

"Whereas there should be a transparent process for accessing therapy through the children's treatment centres;

"Whereas all additional investments in children's treatment centres should maximize front-line services and reduce excess management costs;

"Whereas parents should be able to access an independent appeal process;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"As currently many children and youth are being deprived of necessary therapies, which result in adverse long-term health effects, we are pleading with you to address this immediately;

"Urge the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to provide the necessary and required therapy to children and youth with all disabilities on a consistent and ongoing basis, with a choice of direct-funding model, to fulfill the government's commitment to support all

children to allow these services to increase their ability to participate fully at home, school and in the community.”

I thank Sherry for this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Emerson to bring to the Clerk.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

I will sign this and send it to the table.

CORMORANTS

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are growing concerns that the rapid population growth of double-crested cormorants in the Great Lakes region is having a negative impact on the ecosystems of many shorelines, inland waterways and island habitats; and

“Whereas double-crested cormorants nest in large colonies, stressing sensitive freshwater ecosystems and ruining biodiversity; and

“Whereas double-crested cormorant guano is toxic, killing trees and vegetation, and destroying traditional nesting habitats for other shoreline birds, such as the tern, egret or heron; and

“Whereas an adult double-crested cormorant will eat approximately one pound of fish per day, including game fish, which anglers and commercial fisheries say is impacting fishing in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources has failed to take action in the last decade to address the rapid population growth of double-crested cormorants throughout the Great Lakes region;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario moves quickly to bring Bill 205, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Act, 2016, before a legislative committee for review and public comment without further delay.”

I fully support it, affix my name and send it with page Will.

KOMOKA PROVINCIAL PARK

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the Thames Valley Trail Association and the many Londoners who signed this petition to remove the new fees from Komoka Provincial Park.

“Whereas Komoka Provincial Park has long served residents and visitors to London, offering free access to beautiful views and numerous recreational hiking trails; and

“Whereas evidence has shown that access to the natural environment helps to reduce stress, improve mental well-being, and lower risks for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart attacks and cancer; and

“Whereas new parking fees ranging from \$5.75 to \$14.50 for daily use of Komoka Provincial Park have been imposed without consultation and without additional amenities to justify the new costs, appearing to be simply a cash grab by the Liberal government; and

“Whereas the lack of bike lanes and bus routes connecting Komoka Provincial Park to London, and the prohibition on roadside parking, requires almost all visitors to drive to the park and pay to park their vehicles; and

“Whereas the new fees are likely to decrease park visits with negative consequences for community health and well-being;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry eliminate the parking fees introduced in August 2016 to ensure that Komoka Provincial Park remains accessible to residents of the city of London and all Ontarians.”

I couldn't agree more. I affix my signature and give it to page Andy to take to the table.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to give a shout-out to constituents Jasmine Rusnak and Emma Fletcher for their advocacy to help install an elevator at Malvern Collegiate Institute.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was created with the purpose of developing and enforcing accessibility standards to create an accessible Ontario by January 1, 2025; and

“Whereas Malvern Collegiate Institute ranks in the Fraser Institute's top 30 schools, yet is not accessible to students with a physical disability or to those who use mobility devices because it is three storeys and offers no ramps, stair lifts or elevators; and

"Whereas all students should have the right to attend a good school that is welcoming and accommodating of all students; and

"Whereas teachers, guest speakers, parents and other visitors to the school who have certain disabilities are unable to enter the school and fully participate in school events either easily or at all properties; and

"Whereas students with physical disabilities may be forced to attend other schools solely on the basis of accessibility, which may deprive students from opportunities because of their impairment or disability; and

"Whereas the budget for elevator installation and other capital improvements in public schools is controlled by the province of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario grant the Toronto District School Board a specific allocation of funds for the installation of an elevator at Malvern Collegiate Institute, to make the facility more accessible to people with physical disabilities and/or users of mobility devices."

It's an excellent petition, an excellent idea. I support it entirely and leave it with page Benjamin.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it's an honour to stand. I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly that says:

"Whereas residents of Ontario want an immediate moratorium on all further industrial wind farm development;

"Whereas residents living in close proximity to proposed turbine locations are concerned about the impact on their health, the local environment, declining property values and the lack of local decision-making on industrial wind farm projects;

"Whereas unaffordable subsidies paid through the feed-in tariff program are causing electricity rates to skyrocket;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To place a moratorium on all further industrial wind farm development, restore local decision-making, and to cancel the feed-in tariff program."

I support this petition. I affix my signature to it and I will leave it with page Alessandro.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France G  linas: I'd like to thank Mathieu Simon, who is a volunteer with the Sudbury and District Health Unit, for collecting the names on this petition, as well as Daniel Prevost, who works for the health unit. It reads as follows:

"Whereas in the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

"The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on-screen;

"A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

"More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related" diseases, "incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs;....

"The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

"79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated G, PG, 14A...;

"The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;"

1350

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ... examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario...."

I support this petition and will affix my name to it and ask page Adam to bring it to the Clerk.

DENTAL CARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer's disease; and

"Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

"Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

"—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

"—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

"—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name and send it to the table with page Olivia.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

“Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government’s lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount; and

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills; and

“Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

I fully support, sign my name and send it with page Alessandro.

PHARMACARE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition entitled “Universal Pharmacare for All Ontarians.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas prescription medications are a part of health care and people shouldn’t have to empty their wallets or rack up credit card bills to get the medicines they need;

“Whereas over 2.2 million Ontarians don’t have any prescription drug coverage and one in four Ontarians don’t take their medications as prescribed because they cannot afford the cost;

“Whereas taking medications as prescribed can save lives and help people live better; and

“Whereas Canada urgently needs universal and comprehensive national pharmacare;

“We, the undersigned, express our support for a universal provincial pharmacare plan for all Ontarians.”

So do I, Mr. Speaker. I wholeheartedly support this, affix my name and send it with page Andy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES
AND CONSERVING WATERSHEDS
ACT, 2017LOI DE 2017 VISANT À BÂTIR
DE MEILLEURES COLLECTIVITÉS
ET À PROTÉGER LES BASSINS
HYDROGRAPHIQUES

Mr. Mauro moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 139, An Act to enact the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, 2017 and the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre Act, 2017 and to amend the Planning Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and various other Acts /
Projet de loi 139, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur le Tribunal d’appel de l’aménagement local et la Loi de 2017 sur le Centre d’assistance pour les appels en matière d’aménagement local et modifiant la Loi sur l’aménagement du territoire, la Loi sur les offices de protection de la nature et diverses autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister to lead off the debate.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to say right off the top that I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, Kathryn McGarry.

Before I go on, this Ontario Municipal Board legislation was a very long and intensive process for my ministry, and I just want to give a shout-out to a couple of people. I want to first of all thank my parliamentary assistant, the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, Lou Rinaldi, sitting right behind me here. Member Rinaldi was very involved in this process and has helped us in a wide variety of ways and certainly in the large public consultation process that went on. Lou was with us there every step of the way, and I want to thank Lou directly for his help.

Also, Minister Naqvi, from the Ministry of the Attorney General, the member from Ottawa Centre: This issue was of great importance to him, as well, and his ministry. The two of us championed this legislation. I want to thank Minister Naqvi for his help, as well as my staff. I want to give a shout-out to my chief of staff,

Brent McCurdy, and to my senior policy adviser on this piece, Josh Arnold.

This was a major undertaking for us in our ministry, and I just want to make sure I thank all of those people for their help along the way to get us to the point of second reading leadoff here today.

Speaker, I'm pleased to have this opportunity to discuss Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act.

In my travels as Minister of Municipal Affairs, there's one thing I can't help but notice, and that is that construction is booming in many parts of our province. In Toronto alone, 176 buildings are under construction; another 430 are planned. In Ottawa, 81 buildings are in the planning stages. Development is taking place in communities throughout the province in many forms: condominiums, stacked towns, row housing, single detached homes, commercial developments, industrial developments and more.

Against this backdrop, effective land use planning is crucial in every Ontario municipality. The Ontario we build today will determine the communities that we will live in tomorrow and for years to come. We need to get this right. We need to ensure fairness for all involved: local politicians, city planners, residents and builders. We need to support the achievement of complete communities that offer more options for living, working, learning, shopping and playing—communities that reduce traffic gridlock by improving access to a greater range of transportation options, that provide housing options to meet the needs of people at any age, and that work to revitalize downtowns to become more vibrant and to provide convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, public service facilities and a full range of housing. It's also vitally important that we curb sprawl and protect farmland and green spaces. Achieving these goals will promote long-term economic growth.

The government has taken several steps to reform Ontario's land use planning system to achieve these goals. These steps include changes to the Planning Act related to land use planning appeals.

In 2015, this Legislature passed Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, brought forth by my colleague the former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ted McMeekin. This bill gave municipalities better tools to fund growth and protect and promote green spaces. It gave residents a more meaningful say in how their communities grow. The bill made the development charges system more predictable, more transparent and more accountable, and it made the planning and appeals process more predictable. Lastly, Bill 73 gave municipalities more independence. The bill made it easier to resolve disputes by providing the option of an additional 90 days to come to an agreement on issues involving official plans and amendments, allowing more opportunities to resolve disputes locally, to make it easier and more efficient to resolve disputes without going before the Ontario Municipal Board. These measures have improved the system, but we want to make it even better.

1400

As part of my mandate letter as Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Premier tasked me with leading a review of the Ontario Municipal Board, along with the Attorney General. By engaging municipalities, the public and other interested stakeholders, we were asked to recommend reforms to improve the OMB's role within the broader land use planning system.

My ministry and the Ministry of the Attorney General began this review in the spring of 2016. The review focused on the scope of matters the OMB adjudicates, and the board's effectiveness. In the fall of 2016, we released a consultation document that included a range of potential reforms. Through the consultations, we received more than 1,100 written submissions. We also held several in-person consultations. More than 700 people participated in 12 town hall meetings we held across the province, including in Ottawa, Newmarket, Clarington, Hamilton, Windsor, London, Guelph, Oakville, Sudbury, Toronto, Mississauga and Thunder Bay.

At all of the town halls, it quickly became evident that there was strong overall support for the review. Even supporters of the OMB thought it could be improved. Many people said that too many land use planning decisions are appealed, resulting in costly hearings and too many delays. We also heard frequently, although not from all sectors, that there should be more respect for municipal decisions.

In addition to concerns about outcomes, we heard concerns about the process. Individuals and groups told us that it is far too difficult for residents and community groups to participate in the process. We heard stories of citizens having to spend their personal savings just to pursue an OMB appeal. Meanwhile, other groups seemingly had unlimited resources to pursue appeals.

There were legitimate concerns about fairness and balance. Community groups felt they lacked the knowledge or the professional resources to participate at OMB hearings in a meaningful way. Many also said that the OMB process had become too intimidating and that hearings went on for far too long. There was also a real desire to tone down the adversarial nature of the hearings.

We heard a lot of different views, and we also identified some recurring themes. We heard there was a desire for more community involvement, a more meaningful voice in the process, more local control over planning decisions, fewer and shorter hearings and a more transparent process. We listened and we took note.

We received a wide range of comments from ratepayer groups, from municipalities, from the development sector, and from professional organizations such as the Ontario Bar Association and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute as well as environmental organizations like Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association. It's clear that the OMB generates a lot of debate.

We heard diverging positions within each sector and in different parts of the province about how we could change the OMB to be more open and fair. In the greater

Toronto area, a common sentiment expressed is that the OMB too often favours one particular sector, and that more deference should be given to municipal decisions. In other regions, a common view is that the OMB is needed to protect the broader public interest, such as environmental protection.

There was a general agreement about the need to make improvements. We agree, and that's why we're proposing this legislation. The changes we are proposing stem from the ideas put forward in our consultation document and from what we heard during the OMB review.

On May 30, I introduced legislation that would, if passed, make transformative changes to improve the land use planning and appeals system. That legislation, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, would, if passed, result in fewer and shorter appeal hearings and a more efficient decision-making process.

As Minister of Municipal Affairs, I am pleased that the reforms we are proposing would give more deference to municipal decisions. That's what our municipal partners have asked for, and that's what we feel we have delivered. The reforms we are proposing would give communities a stronger voice in the land use planning process, and give more weight to local and provincial decisions.

Since introducing the bill, many municipal leaders have spoken out in favour of the proposed reforms. Toronto mayor John Tory said, "I believe these reforms move us in the direction that we want to go, which is more local responsibility for local planning decisions."

Brampton mayor Linda Jeffrey said, "We are making great strides in becoming a different city, and in a fast-growing city like Brampton, we welcome the ... proposed reforms of the land use planning appeal system."

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson said our proposed reforms will help "create a level playing field between communities and people who want to build in their communities."

Barrie Mayor Jeff Lehman said our proposed reforms reinforce "the democratic legitimacy of councils and reflects the basic premise that the residents of a community should shape its future through their elected officials...."

And Kitchener Mayor Berry Vrbanovic said what "this proposal is going to do is return the determination of our community's destiny back to the community."

I'd say those are some pretty significant quotes from a number of mayors across the province.

Speaker, this is just some of the supportive feedback we have received. Our municipal leaders work hard to make Ontario's communities stronger. They do an incredibly important job representing the interests and concerns of their constituents. I appreciate that so many of Ontario's municipal leaders have spoken out strongly in support of this proposed legislation.

I'll now get into key aspects of the proposed legislation in greater detail. Firstly, the Ontario Municipal Board would be replaced with the Local Planning Appeal

Tribunal. The proposed legislation would reduce the number of appeals that are heard by limiting what could be brought before the new tribunal. In many jurisdictions, when the province or the senior level of government approves major planning documents such as official plans, these decisions are not appealable. We are proposing the same sort of approach for official plans and official plan updates approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This would include situations in which municipalities are bringing their official plans into alignment with provincial plans, like the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and/or any other provincial plan. The province and municipalities will have to collaborate early in the official plan update process to ensure that both local and provincial matters are addressed. Our goal is to place a greater emphasis on the front end of the official plan review process, leading to a more streamlined and efficient approval by the ministry at the end of the process.

Speaker, we are proposing to also bring forward a reform regarding minister's zoning orders, or MZO's. As you know, MZO's are used quite sparingly, usually to support an economic development opportunity, like an auto plant, or to protect an environmental feature. We proposed to remove the mandatory referral of MZO's to the tribunal. The Minister of Municipal Affairs would be the final decision-maker on requests to amend or revoke a minister's zoning order.

The bill proposes changes that would, if passed, also make the appeals process shorter and less costly. This would happen thanks to the introduction of deadlines throughout the process. Attorney General Yasir Naqvi will provide more detail on the tribunal processes at second reading and as this moves forward. While we are proposing changes to make the hearing process at the tribunal more efficient, we are also proposing to provide municipalities with more time to make decisions on some matters. We believe that by providing municipalities with more time to consult with the public and more time to negotiate locally developed solutions, we can avoid more appeals. Taken together, these changes, if passed, will help bring development, including new housing, to market faster by reducing the numbers of matters that come before the board. Municipalities would also be able to implement provincial and local policies faster—policies that support complete communities and a range of housing types.

As you know, Speaker, the Planning Act outlines municipalities' authority related to land use planning. We propose to reinforce a municipality's role in the land use planning process by reducing the tribunal's ability to overturn municipal decisions. The proposed tribunal's jurisdiction would be limited to considering whether a municipal decision is consistent and conforms with provincial and local plans and policy. This is an important piece and I'm going to read it again: The proposed tribunal's jurisdiction would be limited to considering whether a municipal decision is consistent and conforms with provincial and local plans and policies. If the

tribunal found a municipal decision aligns with provincial and local plans and policies, the municipal decision would be final. If the tribunal found that a municipal decision is inconsistent or does not conform, the matter would be returned to the municipality for reconsideration.

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This proposed change would result in fewer decisions being brought before the tribunal. This change would give more weight to the decisions made by municipal officials—officials who have been elected to serve in the interest of the communities they represent. This type of standard would apply to appeals concerning the adoption or approval of official plan amendments, zoning bylaws, and community planning permit systems. It would also apply to refusals or non-decisions on requests to amend official plans, zoning by-laws, and community planning permit systems.

Decisions that don't align with provincial and local policies would be sent back to the municipality for it to make a new decision. The municipality would generally have 90 days to make this new decision to address the concerns of the tribunal. That second municipal decision would be final unless it was appealed. If the decision—the second decision—is appealed, the tribunal would hear the matter to determine whether the subsequent decision aligns with local and provincial policies. If it does align, the second municipal decision would stand. If the proposed tribunal found the second municipal decision again inconsistent or non-conforming with local or provincial policies, the tribunal would make the final decision.

I want to talk about what we propose for secondary or neighbourhood plans. These plans are a significant undertaking for a municipality. The development of these plans typically involves extensive community and stakeholder involvement and a significant investment of time and resources invested by the municipality and local residents. Municipal officials, ratepayer groups, and concerned residents have told us that in many cases, no sooner do they have a secondary plan in place than an application is made to change it. Not only does this detract from proper implementation of the policies; it also diverts municipal staff from doing other worthwhile planning work.

The government proposes that no amendments be allowed to secondary plans for the first two years unless allowed by the local council. As a best practice, people with an interest in the area covered by a secondary plan should, wherever possible, be involved long before, when a municipality is preparing a secondary plan, rather than relying on the amendment process after the fact.

We also propose to limit appeals of interim control bylaws. Municipal councils pass these bylaws to put a pause on development. This gives them time to do a study of a particular issue or areas. We are proposing that there be no appeal of municipal interim control bylaws when first passed for a period of up to one year. This would let municipalities get on with the studies that they

need to do rather than preparing to defend the interim control bylaw at hearings. Currently, interim control bylaws can be extended for up to two years from when first passed. That would continue, but extensions would be appealable.

Transit-supportive communities give people the option to walk, bike or take public transit. They reduce traffic congestion, create strong and thriving community centres, and they are vital in the fight against climate change. Our government recognizes the importance of modern, accessible transit. We are investing billions of dollars to bring new transit options to communities in all parts of the province.

To make the best possible use of our government's transit investments and to help support municipal control over local planning, we are proposing a new planning tool that municipalities can use. This tool would allow municipalities to designate and zone protected major transit station areas. The province or an approval authority would approve these policies when they're being put in place and whenever they are being changed. When the municipality designates these areas, there would be no appeal of the official plan policies on the number of residents and jobs in the area or on building densities and heights. Once designated, the municipality would zone for density and height requirements meant to support transit service.

There would only be limited opportunities to appeal the zoning requirements. Zoning would need to conform with the provisions and standards set out in the official plan and provincial plans and policies. Municipalities would be able to plan for and develop transit-supportive densities to ensure that they have residents close to transit to encourage the transit ridership that makes the operation of transit cost-effective.

At the same time, municipalities could ensure that development takes place in a way that is consistent with the needs and concerns of their communities and that they would have greater certainty about what kind of development could take place in their community. This would be a discretionary tool that is available to municipalities.

This tool is designed to help municipalities facilitate transit-supportive development and to support public investment in transit infrastructure. This is especially important when you consider the billions of dollars being invested in transit in Ontario. Providing municipalities with the option of using this planning tool also reinforces our goal of giving municipalities more control over local planning, empowering municipalities so they can ensure that the development that takes place takes place in a way that's right for those communities.

The next proposed change concerns local appeal bodies. Municipalities currently have the ability to establish local appeal bodies and, in fact, have had, I believe, since 2006. They can adjudicate certain planning matters rather than referring them to the Ontario Municipal Board. Currently, local appeal bodies can deal with minor variance and consent appeals only. We propose to broaden that to include site plan matters as well.

Up to now, only the city of Toronto has opted to create a local appeal body, and I believe that it was just this year that the city of Toronto moved forward with creating their own local appeal body. Up until this year, approximately two thirds of all planning matters before the city of Toronto that went to the OMB could have been dealt with by a local appeal body. It's just in the last few months that the city of Toronto has put in place their own local appeal body—the only municipality to this point in the province that has done so.

This body, the local appeal body now in place at the city of Toronto, has started hearing cases. Since May of this year, most appeals from the Toronto committee of adjustment have been going to the Toronto local appeal body instead of the OMB. This is a significant piece. We're pleased that Toronto has created their own local appeal body, and we encourage other municipalities to follow suit. Keeping land use planning decisions local is one of our key objectives with this reform of the OMB. Local appeal bodies are yet another tool in the municipal toolkit that can help ensure this objective.

To allow municipalities to exercise their greater decision-making authority and to allow for more meaningful consultation with the public, as I mentioned earlier, we propose to extend the time frame in which municipalities and approval authorities must make decisions on certain planning matters. Currently, municipalities and approval authorities must make decisions on planning applications involving official plans within 100 days. On zoning bylaws, decisions have to be made within 120 days. Otherwise, the lack of a decision can be appealed to the OMB. We propose to increase each of the time periods by 30 days, giving more opportunity to work out issues locally and avoid disputes going to the proposed local appeal tribunal.

I think we can all agree that settling matters locally is in everyone's best interest. All Ontarians should be able to count on a land use planning and appeals system that is efficient, transparent and predictable, one that gives residents and municipalities a say in what is built in their neighbourhoods. Our goal is to support municipalities and communities with our proposed reforms.

Again, judging by the response from municipal leaders, it seems that we have hit the mark. City of London Councillor Josh Morgan said: "I think it is transformational. It is a significant change.... This is a big win for fans of local decision-making. Voters should be able to hold city council and local planners accountable for the decisions they make."

Newmarket Deputy Mayor John Taylor had this to say: "Municipalities can be trusted with this authority.... It doesn't mean we will ignore other planning policies but it allows us to say maybe not there but let us show you where to build."

We definitely appreciate the positive feedback we have received from our municipal leaders right across the province. But to be fair, we also know that there are those who favour the status quo. But our government is committed to overhauling the province's land use appeal

system to place more decision-making power in the hands of communities.

I now give the floor to Minister McGarry, who will speak about how this proposed legislation will modernize the Conservation Authorities Act and guide the conservation of Ontario's watershed.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister Mauro. It gives me pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge as I have the honour of addressing the Legislature on Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. I'll speak specifically to the part of the bill that proposes the changes to the Conservation Authorities Act.

Again, I want to welcome Kim Gavine, the general manager of Conservation Ontario, as well as the chairman of the board of directors of Conservation Ontario, Dick Hibma, to the Legislature today. I also want to take this opportunity to thank my parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Ajax-Pickering, Joe Dickson, my minister's office staff, as well as the staff in my ministry, for their work on Bill 139. It's a pleasure to stand to talk about it today.

Ontario is committed to protecting and preserving our natural environment, while balancing social and economic development in our communities. As Ontario's population grows, the demands placed on our water resources also increase.

Our province's regulatory framework has evolved over the years to new pressures on the environment. As a result, resource management at the provincial and municipal level has become increasingly complex. That's why the province initiated a review of the Conservation Authorities Act. We wanted to identify opportunities to improve the legislative, regulatory and policy framework that governs the creation, operation and activities of conservation authorities, otherwise known as CAs.

The Ontario government recognizes the importance of managing key natural resources to meet the current and future needs of Ontarians. Conservation authorities play an important role in ensuring that Ontario remains the beautiful, healthy and green province that it is now. As pressures on our environment increase, we need to ensure that this valuable tool is modernized to meet the climate change challenge of this generation.

Conservation authorities are local public sector organizations similar to public health units. They have played a significant role in Ontario's natural resource management landscape for 70 years. In that time, they have amassed an impressive record of protecting people, property and communities from water-related natural hazards such as flooding, drought and erosion.

The Ontario government has had a long-standing, productive relationship with conservation authorities. Ontario recognizes and values the important work done by our conservation authorities in support of our vibrant, healthy and safe communities.

Conservation authorities carry out programs that serve provincial and municipal interests, including natural hazard management; flood and erosion control; ice management, flood forecasting and warning; drought and low-water programs; and clean water protection. At no time in the past has it been more relevant to today's public than with the climate change issues that we have been seeing recently in the news. Our public has become quite aware of all of these issues. You can't open a media outlet without recognizing an article on climate change or flooding in recent days.

Conservation authorities also provide advice to municipalities on natural hazard management and regulate development and other activities in areas affected by water-based natural hazards such as flood plains, shorelines and wetlands. Conservation authorities may also deliver programs that address local priorities such as stewardship and conservation, including tree-planting and habitat restoration; watershed studies, research and education programs—and Speaker, may I say that the Grand River Conservation Authority works with Forests Ontario to help administer our 50 Million Tree Program, and I was out several times with those folks and other conservation authorities and planting trees everywhere I went this summer, which was a wonderful thing to do.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Hear, hear.

Applause.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you.

But conservation authorities are also responsible for recreation programs, including operating conservation areas and other services to municipalities.

Again, I want to give a shout-out to the Grand River Conservation Authority and all the conservation authorities that operate some of these conservation areas, camping and activities for families over the summer. I had many occasions to visit that this past summer, as did many other families.

Communities across Ontario benefit from the efforts of our conservation authorities. They are a vital part of our society. This was echoed and highlighted by many stakeholders and interested parties in the feedback received during Ontario's Conservation Authorities Act review process.

In order to continue meeting these needs into the future, it is important for Ontario to have a modern, effective and efficient framework for the management of conservation authorities. The regulatory framework that manages conservation authorities needs to be fair, it needs to be predictable, and it needs to be flexible enough to accommodate future demands and challenges. We need a strong, modern Conservation Authorities Act that will be effective today as well as into the future.

Speaker, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry administers the Conservation Authorities Act on behalf of the province. This act enables two or more municipalities within a common watershed to establish or join a conservation authority to deliver local resource management programs for provincial and municipal interests. This is done in conjunction with the province.

The Conservation Authorities Act details the structure, powers, funding and general operations of a conservation authority. Each conservation authority is established as a corporate body governed by a board of directors. The act lays out the composition of the board, which is comprised of municipal appointees who must comply with the legislative requirements and be directly accountable to the municipality that they represent.

Conservation authorities currently deliver the province's natural hazards program. This involves flood and erosion control, and includes the management of supporting infrastructure, like dams.

Again, I need to give a shout-out to all those conservation authorities and all the folks that are delivering and monitoring our surface-water programs, to ensure that municipalities are aware of any potential flooding in their area. I have to point out that many people are recognizing the effects of climate change on our provincial landscape and on our watersheds in our municipalities when they look at some of the downbursts of water and the floods that are happening.

I need to give another shout-out to the Grand River Conservation Authority for their management of the flood that came through the Grand River on June 23. I got in my car and went around to all the bridges that were flocked to by hundreds of people to see the water levels as high as they were in the flood of 1974 through Cambridge. The mitigating features that the Grand River Conservation Authority put in place at that time held. There was no flooding in downtown Cambridge proper. It wasn't until below the bridges south of the city that we saw some of the water cresting onto the roadway.

Again, a shout-out to all the conservation authorities and all their partners, who really do help monitor our flooding and erosion control.

The Conservation Authorities Act also enables conservation authorities to undertake a wide range of resource management activities, with varying accountabilities. This includes local resource management activities, municipal service contracts, and roles under other provincial legislation. There is significant diversity in the programs that conservation authorities deliver.

Speaker, the Conservation Authorities Act has not undergone a comprehensive review in over 20 years. Since then, best practices for natural resource management have evolved significantly, and with population growth and climate change, the demands and the challenges facing our watersheds will continue to increase, as I've been referencing throughout the last few moments.

1430

If passed, this bill would amend the Conservation Authorities Act to provide a strengthened and modernized framework for conservation authorities and guide the conservation of Ontario's watersheds. It would ensure that the conservation authorities have the flexibility and the tools needed to address growing environmental pressures while delivering the services that Ontarians expect and rely on.

Speaker, Ontario and its conservation authorities have shared a rich and productive relationship for seven

decades, and I think that's something that we are all proud of in Ontario. We're proud of what we've accomplished. A shout-out, again, to Conservation Ontario, who is with us today. Together, we have forged a successful legacy of resource stewardship and an impressive record of protecting people, property and communities from water-related hazards. Communities across Ontario benefit from the efforts of our conservation authorities in natural hazard prevention and management, in flood and erosion control, and in drinking water source protection, among other things—something that the public in Ontario really takes seriously, as do we.

For another example, the Grand River Conservation Authority is undertaking more than 30 flood and water control infrastructure projects. This effort is being supported by local municipalities and my ministry, and includes work on the Cambridge flood wall in my own community.

Conservation authorities are vital to our province, and Ontario is committed to supporting them. This year, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is providing nearly \$7.5 million in funding for operating costs and an additional \$5 million in capital for dam and erosion control infrastructure projects. Approximately \$570,000 in funding has also been provided for joint habitat and species restoration projects in the Great Lakes.

Speaker, I'd like to now provide some context to the activities leading up to the second reading of this proposed legislation before us today.

Members of the Legislature may recall that in 2015, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry initiated a review of the Conservation Authorities Act. The goal of this review was to identify opportunities to improve the legislative, regulatory and policy framework that governs the creation, operation and activities of conservation authorities. This included reviewing the roles, responsibilities, funding and governance of conservation authorities and the programs and services that they deliver.

I am very proud to say that my ministry undertook a thorough review and engagement process. It was led by the then parliamentary assistant to my predecessor, the previous Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, Minister Bill Mauro. That PA at the time was the Honourable Eleanor McMahon. I want to thank Minister McMahon for her work in helping to lead this important work and the work of the staff that assisted her.

For the past two years, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry engaged across Ontario with many organizations, including stakeholders, fellow ministries, municipalities, First Nations and Métis communities, and members of the public, in its consultation process. These organizations contributed significantly to the government's understanding of their concerns and to the province's ability to develop informed solutions, solutions that will enable conservation authorities to deliver quality programs and services well into the future.

Conservation authority management can be a complex policy area, and there are many differing opinions on

how best to manage this important public sector organization. As a result, the ministry has taken a holistic approach in its review of the act and in developing this proposed legislation, which was informed by an extensive consultation process.

To better understand the areas of concern and explore solutions that would enable the effective drafting of this bill, the ministry intently listened to the many views of a cross-section of stakeholders and people throughout the province. The process allowed for the collection of substantial and constructive input from many stakeholders, indigenous communities and interested parties in an open and transparent way.

Speaker, I'd like to describe the steps my ministry carried out to get us to this point. In support of the review, my ministry, with input from other Ontario ministries, prepared a discussion paper that posed questions on the roles and responsibilities, funding and governance of conservation authorities. In addition to posting the paper to the Environmental Registry for comment, my ministry held more than 20 independently facilitated sessions and individual meetings. Participants at these meetings included municipalities; conservation authorities; municipal organizations; indigenous organizations; agricultural, environmental and development stakeholders; and members of the public.

The comments my ministry received in response to the discussion paper recognized the valuable role of conservation authorities in education, stewardship, recreation and hazard management. They also revealed a number of areas where there was broad agreement from all sectors on the need for improvement. These areas for improvement included provincial policy direction and oversight and accountability mechanisms, provincial funding levels and clarity in the development and use of municipal levies and fees, and clarity and consistency in conservation authorities' mandate and regulatory requirements.

The feedback the ministry received was used to develop the priorities paper. This document was posted on the Environmental Registry in May 2016, and it sought to gain input on proposed priority areas for improvement and supporting actions being considered by the ministry.

In addition to that second Environmental Registry posting, we held five regional multi-sector stakeholder engagement sessions across the province, targeted stakeholder meetings, and First Nations and Métis engagement sessions. The feedback that we received in response to this paper helped confirm the priority areas for improvement. It also provided input on a range of potential legislative, regulatory, policy and program changes that could be pursued by the ministry. We collected the valuable comments and recommendations received and used them to develop the proposed legislation and the regulatory and policy framework amendments that have been presented in this bill.

Speaker, I'd like to recognize the significant contributions made by those organizations that did participate in our consultation processes and provided written sub-

missions. These include, again, conservation authorities, municipalities, agricultural organizations, environmental and community organizations, industry groups, indigenous communities and the public.

I'm pleased to say that we heard from a broad range of organizations, including:

- Conservation Ontario, a long-standing partner with my ministry, for many years, which represents 36 conservation authorities;

- the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, which advocates on behalf of the 440 municipalities across the province;

- agricultural organizations, including the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario;

- environmental stakeholders, including Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association, strong advocates for environmental protection; and

- Ontario's construction sector, including the Ontario Home Builders' Association, the voice of 4,000 residential building companies.

All of these organizations have been very active in our consultation process. Their valuable input has been considered in the development of the consultation documents and the proposed legislation being debated today. Their feedback will also be considered in the development of future changes to regulations and policy.

1440

I should note that indigenous communities and organizations have also provided meaningful input to this current major milestone.

Speaker, as mentioned, if passed, this act would create a strengthened and modern framework for conservation authorities in Ontario. Changes to the policy framework would be undertaken in a phased approach. The changes to legislation are proposed to occur first in this bill, followed by changes to regulations, policies and programs.

All of these proposed changes aim to address concerns from the public, from the stakeholders and from indigenous communities regarding the management of conservation authorities in the province.

I'd now like to speak to the main changes and actions being proposed to the Conservation Authorities Act. Again, if passed, this legislation would provide the framework for stronger oversight and accountability in conservation authority decision-making. This would be achieved by:

- updating appointment processes and requirements, and conservation authority governance practices;

- enabling the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to conduct program and operational reviews; and

- confirming expectations for conservation authority restructuring decisions.

The legislation would also provide the framework for increased clarity and consistency in conservation

authority programs and services. This would be accomplished by clarifying:

- the role of conservation authorities and expectations for provincially mandated programs and services;

- municipally assigned programs and services; and

- programs and services specific to watersheds.

This framework would set the stage for increased clarity and consistency in regulatory roles and requirements. This includes:

- clarifying the scope of activities subject to conservation authority approval and a conservation authority's review;

- updating compliance mechanisms and enforcement tools; and

- enabling the province to regulate other activities within the conservation authority's area of jurisdiction in the future.

This bill would also allow for improved collaboration and engagement among all parties involved in resource conservation. This would include increasing:

- indigenous, public, and stakeholder outreach and engagement;

- indigenous community participation in conservation authorities;

- collaboration between conservation authorities and the province; and

- collaboration and engagement on service delivery standards.

Finally, the legislation would support modernized funding mechanisms that support conservation authority operations. This would include:

- updating how costs are apportioned among participating municipalities; and

- increasing clarity and consistency in the development and use of fees.

These proposed changes are set out in the companion document which I mentioned earlier, *Conserving Our Future: A Modernized Conservation Authorities Act*. It was also posted to the Environmental Registry.

If Bill 139 is passed by the Legislature, the changes we propose will create consistency of roles and responsibilities among conservation authorities and will strengthen public confidence in their decision-making.

Many of the proposed legislative amendments are enabling only. Should the Legislature pass this bill, some changes would come into effect immediately, while others would come into effect at a later date. Some of the key changes that would come into effect immediately include:

- a new purpose statement clarifying the role of conservation authorities in resource management;

- enhanced authority for municipalities to appoint members; and

- the ability for my ministry to conduct program and operational reviews.

Changes that would come into effect at a later date include:

—requirements for conservation authorities to update their administrative bylaws and make them publicly available;

—new regulations outlining expectations for the delivery of programs and services; and

—the strengthening of conservation authorities' role in protecting people and property from flooding and other water-related natural hazards.

The proposed changes to the regulatory and policy framework will, of course, be subject to further public consultation.

Bill 139 was posted on the Environmental Registry for 60 days, ending July 31. The supporting document, *Conserving Our Future*, will remain on the registry for informational purposes. I'd like to share some of the feedback that we received during that period.

In its submission, Conservation Ontario indicated that overall, it "supports movement forward on the government's proposed actions to modernize the Conservation Authorities Act and policy framework."

The organization said that the proposed changes address a series of priorities that Conservation Ontario identified and promoted during the review, including requiring conservation authorities to meet public sector best management practices and standards, and establishing a multi-stakeholder service delivery review committee to address this client service issue.

Kim Gavine, Conservation Ontario's general manager, added, "We appreciate the acknowledgement that conservation authorities play an important role in addressing today's environmental and resource management challenges. We look forward to working with MNR and other ministries and stakeholders to implement the outcomes of the Conservation Authorities Act review."

Lynn Dollin, president of AMO, wrote that the proposal contains a framework that "largely favours that changes that municipal governments have been seeking for some time." AMO welcomes that the bill clearly states the purpose and clarifies the role of the conservation authority; that other parts of the bill permit an additional scope of work based on local service agreements; and that the bill adds clarity to the permit process and regulated areas of responsibility.

AMO appreciates that several parts of the bill bring conservation authorities' meeting procedures in line with municipal government procedures, including notice of meetings, open and closed meetings, certain staff roles, freedom of information, and procedural bylaws.

These were just two of many submissions received.

I want to again thank the members of the public, indigenous communities, stakeholder groups, municipalities and other ministries for their ongoing input and support. I greatly appreciate their active, informed participation at all stages of this process, and I really look forward to continuing to work with them through the legislative process and beyond.

Speaker, I said that we heard from many organizations during the periods when we consulted on our discussion paper and priorities paper, and I have just shared com-

ments from two important stakeholders, Conservation Ontario and AMO.

I'd also like to share some other feedback from people who govern and manage conservation authorities in this province, so I'll read you three comments that were received on Bill 139.

I'll start with Elizabeth VanHooren, who is the general manager and secretary-treasurer at the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority. This is what she had to say:

"To get it to this stage is welcome news. In general, I think we're pleased with the changes that are being proposed. The Conservation Authorities Act basically encompasses everything that we do. I think the main objective behind it was wanting to strengthen the accountability of conservation authorities ... and modernize our funding mechanism. That's a big one, especially for the conservation authorities to begin exploring that and see changes."

Ms. VanHooren also appreciates that the proposed legislation bolsters the reality that conservation authorities are an important and valued creature on the landscape. She also stated:

"Basically that means we aren't just looking at one aspect of the environment; we're looking at the whole picture ... we aren't just a creature of the province. Our most public image, I guess, is our conservation areas, but our programs and services extend far beyond that."

Mark Majchrowski, the chief administrative officer of Kawartha Conservation, also notes that there is a sharper focus on watershed management practices in the proposed legislation. He said, "It's just a start, a framework that started in 2015 with a review of the Conservation Authorities Act. But it's adding a purpose that wasn't there before." As Mr. Majchrowski says, conservation authorities "are not just about flooding."

He found several of the proposed changes in Bill 139 good, including strengthening the agencies' authority, and a significant boost in fines. He said: "Conservation authorities would now be able to issue stop-work orders, which they couldn't do before, and there are steeper fines for violations. Previously, the fine for an individual was [up to] \$10,000 per day; that is now \$50,000. Also, there were no fines for corporations; now the fine is \$1 million. That's significant."

1450

Speaker, members will be well aware, again, that I represent Cambridge. My city is within the Grand River watershed, and the GRCA manages water and other natural resources on behalf of 39 municipalities and close to one million residents in that watershed. I think I've told you that they do great work as well.

I'm pleased to be able to quote the chair of the GRCA, Helen Jowett, on the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, which, she says, "recognize the value the conservation authorities have had in providing science-based management of the province's land and water resources." She said, "I think they have taken a balanced approach to these changes."

There's still much work to be done. One of the first actions that we'll be taking to support the implementation

of these proposed changes will be to establish a multi-ministry working group. It will be tasked with advising my ministry on the development of proposed regulatory changes and options for increasing provincial funding levels. We're also establishing a multi-stakeholder service delivery review committee, as I mentioned earlier, which will support the ministry in developing proposed policies and procedures.

We will be continuing our phased approach with a comprehensive suite of regulatory, policy and program changes being phased in over the next four years. This will provide the ministry, conservation authorities, participating municipalities, stakeholders, indigenous communities and other interested parties with the opportunity to participate in their development as we move forward, and it will provide sufficient time to address the operational and resource adjustments needed.

Speaker, just as late as yesterday, I had the opportunity to canoe down the Grand River, along with the chair of the GRCA, Joe Farwell, and about 45 members of the community who took part in trying to see the river in a new way. Many had not canoed the Grand River before. There are many areas along that long watershed that canoeists and those that are interested in conserving nature, that are out on our trails, love to participate in. It was a phenomenal day. It did help that it was bright and sunny. But this had to be delayed because, again, earlier this spring, we had a flood along the Grand River that really did affect many of the municipalities. I know that I was in contact with the Minister of Municipal Affairs at the time, and this rush of water came down and they knew about it. What we did find out was that their work as a conservation authority worked. They were able to predict accurately the time that these flood waters would start to rise. Every measure was in place to prevent flooding, and they were able to ensure that our municipalities stayed as safe as they could.

So it was a real pleasure to be out on the river yesterday and have it actually lower than usual. I'd have to say that our canoe did hit a couple of rocks along the way. But it was a beautiful way to look at the work that conservation authorities do in their trail development and all the other services that really have us out being active along the river trails, on our bikes or hiking with our families or in our canoes enjoying this incredible river—and the flora and fauna that are out there too.

I have to give another great example as well. There's some great fly-fishing in the Grand River. We saw many fishermen out enjoying the day and putting their lines in. I didn't stop to see if they'd caught anything.

In conclusion, though, Speaker, I want to recognize once again the significant role that conservation authorities have played in natural resource management in Ontario over the past 70 years. They have an impressive record of protecting people, property and communities from water-related natural hazards, be it flooding, drought or erosion. But the Conservation Authorities Act that allowed for their creation was passed in 1946 and it has not undergone a comprehensive review in more than

two decades. In that time, a great deal has changed in Ontario, and the best practices for natural resource management have evolved significantly.

As a result of its thorough review and engagement process, Ontario has established a clear plan for future legislative, regulatory and policy needs for the province's Conservation Authorities Act framework. Bill 139 lays the foundation for a strong, modern Conservation Authorities Act policy framework that would enable our province to better respond to the resource management challenges of today and tomorrow. It would ensure that conservation authorities are well positioned to continue their role in local watershed-based resource management and deliver additional programs or services for the province in the future, which we will all benefit from.

Again, I want to thank my ministry, my minister's office staff, all of the participants, to ensure that we got to this place today with this proposed Bill 139.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs as well as the Minister of Natural Resources for their informative speeches and the informative debate that they have contributed today to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act.

I just very briefly wanted to thank the minister for her comments on the conservation authorities in the Niagara region. We haven't always had an easy job with some of the conservation authorities in our neck of the woods, as I'm sure you've had the opportunity to see cross your desk. There are concerns with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority and some of the issues that have gone on there. It is important that we see strength in oversight and accountability, providing clarity for conservation authority roles and responsibilities, and also, obviously, improving and encouraging public engagement with our conservation authorities.

I did want to touch very briefly on some of the minister's comments. I think what we have to realize is that it's a great thing to commend the conservation authorities for all the excellent work they do, but it's a whole other thing to tell them what to do, to give them directives—force directives down their throats—without actually increasing some of the funding. We've seen that there are a lot of locals who pay for the funding of the conservation authorities and have concerns that there have not been funding increases for conservation authorities for many years. There have not been significant increases in the amount that's been allocated for these conservation authorities. That makes it a burden for local municipalities, who have to pay the freight at the end of the day, to carry that load. That's a concern I've heard from people who are involved with conservation authorities. So I just wanted to draw that to the attention of the minister.

I think it's important that we don't forget about the OMB. It is important that I get on the record that I had a mayor contact me over the weekend and express his support for various aspects of reforming the OMB. I

wanted to bring that and make sure it's in the Hansard as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise as MPP for London West to respond to the lead remarks by the Minister for Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Natural Resources.

I have to say that it caught my attention when the Minister for Municipal Affairs quoted London city councillor Josh Morgan expressing support for these changes. Certainly, Londoners welcome these long-overdue reforms to the antiquated OMB. This is something that the Liberals have been promising since 2003, so better late than never.

However, our biggest concern in the city of London is around the transition—the transition from the OMB process to the new process that's set out in this bill. I want to quote from some other Londoners who have weighed in on this situation, because our official plan is currently the only official plan that is awaiting hearing by the OMB.

The Urban League of London president, Wes Kinghorn, said, "There is a frustration that what took the input of thousands of Londoners could end up in the hands of a single individual at the OMB."

Deputy mayor Paul Hubert said, "Thousands of Londoners have spoken. Hundreds have shaped the plan and now a few will determine it.... I hope we don't lose the heart of the London plan."

I know that representatives of the city met with the parliamentary secretary for municipal affairs during the AMO conference in August and raised the concern that our London plan will be reviewed under this antiquated, out-of-date, unfair process when this new process has been brought forward. We need a transition plan and transition provisions included in the bill that will allow the London plan, one of the most extensively consulted official plans ever in this province, to be heard under these new rules.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure. By the way, I'll be speaking at some length, later on this afternoon, on this legislation that is before us.

But just a couple of things. To the NDP motion, the transition piece, I think we are going to be dealing with transition pieces through the regulatory process to make sure we capture what we heard and that we capture what has also been there.

It was interesting to hear from the official opposition about the additional money needed for conservation authorities. Yes, it's never enough—we know that—whether it's health care or conservation authorities. It's kind of heartening, though, Mr. Speaker. The member who suggests that forgot or maybe wasn't aware—maybe he wasn't aware. I want to give him the benefit—

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It may be a lie; you're right—when conservation authorities got done in by you-know-who to a big extent, Speaker. But let's be fair: They do great work.

Let me go back a little bit to what this legislation is intended to be—if passed, of course. We want to make sure that there will be some kind of tribunal. There have been some rumours that there will be no tribunals—all left up to the municipality. That's not the case. Yes, it will be redefined, of course, how we do things, but some type of judicial tribunal will be there.

As we heard from municipal leaders and from communities and advocates, they need more clarity and more involvement from all sides. I think both ministers today outlined that there will be provisions for that to happen if this legislation passes.

I look forward to speaking in more detail later on this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I want to remind members that questions and comments following speeches by members are intended to be interactions and comments related to the speeches that were given, not to other comments that have been made related to the speech that was given.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's a privilege to be back at Queen's Park on the first day of this session to rise and debate Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017. It's obviously a very big piece of legislation; it took two ministers to do the one-hour leadoff. I know my seatmate and colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, our critic for MNR, will be rising shortly to debate this bill. We're all anxious to hear his perspective on this legislation. He has studied this quite intensively, so he will deliver in detail some of our positions on this.

As I said, it's a very big bill. I think it affects about 20 pieces of legislation. There are obviously some positive changes in Bill 139, and then there are some areas of concern that we have as the opposition. Hopefully, throughout this debate, the government will put to rest some of these issues.

One thing I would like to raise in this debate is that, in this bill, the government limits the ability to have tribunal fees waived for low-income individuals. This means that community groups will no longer be able to have their fees waived as they could under the OMB Act if the board deemed it appropriate. There are also some concerns that removing oral testimony and cross-examinations will make it more difficult for community groups to challenge opinions and raise their concerns. This is just one concern that I'd like to raise in this debate. I hope to hear, from one of the ministers, a response to the concern.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. I return to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to respond.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you to the members from Niagara

West–Glanbrook, London West, Northumberland–Quinte West and Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for your comments. I very much appreciate your attention this afternoon and look forward to debate on Bill 139—not just the Conservation Authorities Act, but also some of the changes to the OMB.

I heard the comments from the member opposite from Niagara West–Glanbrook, and I’m hoping that he votes to support the budget that supports some of the increases in funding that my ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, have had over the years, which traditionally oppositions have voted against. I would look forward to your support in the next budget, if you don’t mind. I certainly take your comments about that.

Also, I think the member from London West spoke to one of the reasons that this government felt it was so important to move forward with some of the changes to the OMB legislation and to provide that context that allows municipalities, allows individuals, allows businesses more fully to participate in issues regarding the planning in their area. We hope that the changes being brought forward in the building better communities part of this proposed legislation will assist everybody to ensure that they can participate.

Again, I want to thank everybody here for their comments. I look forward to the debate. I know that the conservation authorities are looking forward to the debate regarding increasing clarity and consistency in roles of the authorities, how the framework for stronger oversight and accountability should be strengthened, and we’re looking to ensure that those changes proposed on improved collaboration and engagement among all parties will be part of this bill.

Thank you very much for your comments today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: First of all, as our member for Oxford is attending the public accounts conference, I would ask for unanimous consent to stand down our lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the leadoff speech of the official opposition. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to rise today to comment on Bill 139. Specifically, I’m going to speak to schedule 4, the amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act.

I want to start by stating that I believe the amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act should be its own stand-alone bill. The proposed changes to this act are not simply extensions of the other aspects of Bill 139; they are significant in and of themselves. This bill proposes a new purpose for conservation authorities and proposes to make significant changes to the governance of these bodies. Unfortunately, because the changes to the Ontario Municipal Board will garner most of the attention, the changes to the conservation authorities will get little attention and public scrutiny.

First of all, let me talk about the purpose. As I said, this bill proposes a new purpose for Ontario’s 36

conservation authorities. Admittedly, in the existing act, there is no defined purpose, so I checked ontario.ca, and here’s what it says about roles and responsibilities for conservation authorities:

“Conservation authorities carry out programs that serve provincial and municipal interests, including:

“—natural hazard management

“—flood and erosion control

“—ice management

“—flood forecasting and warning

“—drought/low water program

“—clean water protection (under the Clean Water Act).

“They also:

“—provide advice to municipalities on natural hazard management

“—regulate development and other activities in areas affected by water-based natural hazards (e.g., floodplains, shorelines, wetlands) through a permit process.”

The new purpose of conservation authorities as laid out in this bill will be “to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario.”

I’m not saying I agree or disagree with the purpose, but if we are creating a new purpose for a piece of legislation, that should warrant a separate bill so that we can debate the change fully. Unfortunately, instead of having the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry introduce a separate bill, these long-awaited amendments got folded into this larger bill about the Ontario Municipal Board. I don’t know if this was done to deflect attention from these changes or if this was done because the government didn’t feel they had enough time left in their mandate to introduce and debate a separate bill.

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I want to point out that the document on which these amendments are based was posted on the Environmental Registry in May 2016 and comments were accepted until September 9, 2016. If the government thought these changes were so important, why did they not introduce them until May 30 of this year, three days before the Legislature rose for the summer? If the government felt these changes were so important, they could have introduced them in a stand-alone bill last fall or winter. Let’s be honest: If they had done that, they would have time-allocated the bill like they did with so many others over the past year and it would all be done by now. So it wasn’t important enough to introduce sooner as a stand-alone bill, but now it is so important and the legislative schedule is so full that it had to be folded in with the OMB bill.

Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that there are references to the OMB—that these amendments have been incorporated into Bill 139, which is mainly about changing the Ontario Municipal Board to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. It’s ironic because, even though they’re in the same bill, both in this piece of legislation and in the briefing that we got on this part of the bill there were

references to the OMB in the very same piece of legislation that changes the name of the OMB. There are references to the OMB added to the Conservation Authorities Act in the same piece of legislation that changes the name of the OMB. That demonstrates to me that this was not planned. It looks like it was a last-minute decision to throw the two bills together, and I won't speculate as to why.

But there are things we support in this bill. Let's look at schedule 4 of this bill. First of all, I understand that this update to the Conservation Authorities Act was a long time coming. I spoke to Brian Tayler, CAO of the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, which provides private sewage system permits and inspections in parts of Parry Sound district. He said that the conservation authorities have been asking for their act to be modernized for some time, so I'm glad to see the government is finally doing this.

There are definitely parts of the bill that we can support. Measures to ensure all conservation authorities are transparent and accountable—absolutely, that makes sense. Requiring conservation authorities to publish meeting notices publicly and ensure meetings are open to the public; requiring conservation authorities to have bylaws and to make those bylaws public and review them periodically—those things are all good. It makes sense to lay out the rules for how to change the boundaries of a conservation authority or how to disband a conservation authority, especially given the challenges Hamilton has reportedly been having with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

There are, however, many things in Bill 139 that I would question. I have to wonder why the government wants conservation authorities to combine “administration costs” and “maintenance costs” under “operating expenses.” If this is about improving accountability and transparency, shouldn't we be requiring conservation authorities to break down their costs in more detail rather than less detail? Why change the power to set fees from a system where conservation authorities set the fees subject to approval of the minister to a system where the minister sets ranges for fees in regulations? Perhaps the minister can respond to that in the two-minute response. That seems like a small change, but it is significant. Rather than the conservation authorities—the people who know what their own programs and services cost—setting the fees subject to the approval of the minister, now the minister would set the fees. It is municipalities that appoint members to the board of the conservation authority, so if residents don't like how things are being run or the fees that are being charged, they should hold their municipal councillors and mayor to account for that.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that the municipalities pay the large majority of the costs of conservation authorities. I believe the province only pays about 10% of their costs.

Currently, costs and expenses of conservation authority programs are shared among participating municipalities based on a determination of the benefit each municipality received from a specific project. That seems

reasonable, but this bill repeals that and says costs will be apportioned “in accordance with the regulations.” So my question is, why the change? What are those regulations going to be, and why move that from legislation to regulation, where it won't face the scrutiny of this Legislature?

Because conservation authorities are created along watersheds and not along municipal boundaries, the existing legislation has two clauses that state that where only a part of a participating municipality is within the jurisdiction of the CA, the costs of the CA should only be charged to the “rateable property in that part of the municipality.” Why was this repealed?

The existing act says an authority may make regulations regarding lands owned by the authority. This bill proposes to move that power to the minister with the following clause: “The minister may make regulations with respect to land and other property owned by authorities.” Again, why does the minister need this power?

There are parts of this bill that I think we will oppose.

Qualifications: This bill gives the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry the right to set regulations specifying the qualifications that members of a conservation authority must have. Generally, municipal councillors are appointed to sit on conservation authority boards, but what if none of the municipal councillors have the qualifications that the minister has stipulated? These are democratically elected representatives of the municipality. Who better to represent the municipality and residents on the conservation authority? Elected councillors are the easiest people for residents to hold to account for the conservation authority's actions.

In the briefing that I received from ministry staff—and I want to thank them for that—it was suggested that the minister could require a conservation authority to include an engineer or a biologist. That might be great, but that's not the way our institutions work. You don't have to be a biologist or an engineer to be an MPP or the minister. The minister has biologists and engineers within her ministry, and hopefully she relies on them for advice.

Mr. Speaker, there are changes to entry without warrant that are certainly concerning, raising questions, I would say, for members of the opposition. The existing act stated that an authority or its officer shall not enter property without consent or a warrant, except in very specific cases. This bill proposes to change that to say that an officer appointed by an authority may enter any land situated in the authority's area of jurisdiction for the purposes of determining compliance with regulations or with the conditions of a permit.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read the section of the existing act and then of this bill that deal with the powers of entry. First, the existing Conservation Authorities Act:

“Powers of entry

“(20) An authority or an officer appointed under a regulation made under clause (1)(d) or (e) may enter private property, other than a dwelling or building, without the consent of the owner or occupier and without a warrant, if,

“(a) the entry is for the purpose of considering a request related to the property for permission that is required by a regulation made under clause (1)(b) or (c); or

“(b) the entry is for the purpose of enforcing a regulation made under clause (1)(a),(b) or (c) and the authority or officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a contravention of the regulation is causing or is likely to cause significant environmental damage and that the entry is required to prevent or reduce the damage.”

Other than in these situations, the current act, in 30.1(1), says:

“An authority or an officer ... shall not enter the land without

“(a) the consent of the owner of the land and, if the occupier of the land is not the owner, the consent of the occupier of the land; or

“(b) the authority of a warrant under the Provincial Offences Act, 1998....”

1520

Bill 139 proposes repealing that last clause and replacing it with the following:

“Entry without warrant

“30.1(1) An officer appointed by an authority under section 30 may, subject to subsections (2) and (3), enter any land situated in the authority’s area of jurisdiction for the purposes of determining compliance with subsection 28(1), a regulation made under subsection 28(3) or section 28.5 or with the conditions of a permit issued under section 28.1 or under a regulation made under clause 28.5(1)(c).”

That is not the only place in this bill that the government is proposing expanded rights to entry without need of a warrant. This legislation proposes to give the local planning appeal tribunal the right to enter property without a warrant or consent.

Schedule 4 does say that officers of the conservation authority are not authorized to enter any dwelling or other building on the property and are not authorized to use force. But it goes on to say in 30.1(4) that a an officer may:

“1. Inspect any thing that is relevant to the inspection.

“2. Conduct any tests, take any measurements, take any specimens or samples, set up any equipment and make any photographic or other records that may be relevant to the inspection.

“3. Ask any questions that are relevant to the inspection to the occupant of the land.”

Subsection 30.1(6) says, “An officer who enters land under this section may be accompanied and assisted by any person with such knowledge, skills or expertise as may be required for the purposes of the inspection.” That gives conservation authority officers pretty broad powers to enter just about any property within their jurisdiction. I’m concerned about this because this is part of a pattern with this government. A number of government bills over the past few years have expanded entry without a warrant and, slowly but surely, they are chipping away at the privacy rights of property owners.

Mr. Speaker, what’s missing in this bill? One of the issues that Conservation Ontario identified in its September 2015 response to the Conservation Authorities Act review discussion paper was the need for a “sustainable provincial funding formula that captures and reflects the actual range of conservation authority programs and services that support multiple provincial objectives.” I don’t see that in this bill.

There is a sheet in my briefing note from the ministry entitled “Modernizing Funding Mechanisms,” and I’ll read the points listed there:

“—requiring CAs to publish fee schedules, provide public notice of fee changes and establish processes for the appeal and review of fees.

“—requiring fee administration policies to be made publicly available and periodically reviewed.

“—enable the minister to make regulations respecting the amount of fees that may be charged, including the manner in which fees are calculated.

“—harmonizing financial terms used within the act with municipal accounting terms (i.e. ‘capital costs’ and ‘operating expenses’).

“—enabling the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations governing how capital costs and operating expensing are apportioned by CAs.

“—enabling the LGIC to make regulations governing the body to hear municipal appeals of levy decisions (i.e. Ontario Mining and Lands Commission or Ontario Municipal Board).”

I see lots of things telling conservation authorities how they will manage their financial affairs but nothing promising there will be funding coming from the province. Right now, according to the ministry, conservation authorities receive only 10% of their revenue from the province. They receive approximately 54% from their municipalities, 1% from the federal government, and the remaining 35% is raised through fees and fundraising.

Over the years, the province has put additional responsibilities onto conservation authorities without additional resources to match those responsibilities. My colleague from Perth–Wellington met with the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, and they made the point that the province was to be a partner with municipalities in conservation authorities. They said that municipalities have held up their side of the partnership, but the province has not.

I also want to take this opportunity in the last couple of minutes I have to put on record some comments of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. The OFAH supports the amendments designed to increase oversight and accountability of conservation authorities, but they do raise a concern about the lack of an appeal process for conservation authority decisions, bylaws or fees. In their response to this bill, Robert Cole, land use policy and habitat specialist, writes: “The OFAH supports the numerous sections of the schedule that increase notification requirements and believe these changes are an important factor in increasing transparency of CA activities. However, having transparency with no appeal

or challenging mechanisms in place for residents and stakeholders impacted by CA's actions, bylaws, or programs fails to provide tangible and effective oversight and accountability to the public and stakeholders."

Despite my own concerns about it, I do want to voice the OFAH's support for qualification requirements for board members and composition requirements for boards of CAs. However, they do want to ensure that resource users, such as hunters and anglers, are represented. In the briefing, the emphasis seemed to be on technical qualifications rather than on ensuring participation by different stakeholder groups, so maybe the minister can let us know what she is thinking about in terms of these requirements.

I see that I am pretty much out of time. I would hope that the agricultural community would also be included in the stakeholders. I'll finish up in the two minutes that I have to respond to the comments from other members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to add a little bit to what the member had to say about schedule 4, and more particularly sections 28 and 29. I want to give a real-life example.

I have a dam that holds the water in Clear Lake, just outside of Cartier. The people of Cartier had their wells dug about 60 years ago and never had any problems. Then, last fall and through the winter and the spring, many of their wells went dry. When they started to look around to see what was happening, they realized that CP had decided to basically get rid of the dam, which means that the level of the lake was going further and further down.

When I reached out to the Ministry of Natural Resources to know what was going on, they were very helpful to me to explain. We did the same thing—reached out to the Ministry of the Environment to find out what was going on. But at the end of the day, CP is still allowed to this day to go ahead and take away the dam, which means that Clear Lake, which has been there for generations for people to fish in and for people to drink their well water from, is now on the path of going dry.

To add insult to injury, they had people putting netting in the area to see what to do with the fish. So not only did the locals see that this lake that was plentiful in fish—we could see all of the dead fish caught in those nets while the scientists were doing their survey.

I've brought this forward because this is an example of what happens when constituents don't have a say into the process. And the changes that are in this will make things worse, not better, for my constituents in Cartier.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to my critic the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I look forward to continuing to listen to a lot of the debate this afternoon. I know that the member criticized our enabling legislation, but I just want him to be aware that it has taken us quite a

while to update the act. It has not been updated in 20 years, so a regulatory framework will allow us to upgrade faster.

I know that during the review in the last two years, we've been hearing feedback that not all conservation authorities even provide the same services to their local watershed areas. There are some conservation authorities that are quite small and others that are quite large. We did hear feedback that it's not always clear when conservation authorities are acting on behalf of municipalities, rather than the core mandate that's delivered to them by the province along with that funding. It can seem that those authorities are exceeding their mandate or creeping into the mandate of others. That's one of the reasons why we're trying to clarify the roles and responsibilities. We're proposing to clarify them by bringing in a requirement to have service agreements in place and be publicly available and periodically reviewed.

We're also proposing updates to expand on the bylaws that conservation authorities are required to establish to strengthen and modernize their governance structure. That will certainly be evident for all.

When we're looking at governance, we are certainly going to be having more consultation on how those boards are made up. But generally speaking, the core mandate of flood and erosion control will be funded by the province, and the rest we will look at according to how that governance model is going to look.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm very pleased to be able to stand again and speak to the excellent contributions to this debate that were brought forward by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. As always, he made very astute observations, representing not only his constituents but, I believe, a lot of perspectives from this side of the aisle concerning some of the positive aspects of this legislation as well as some of the pitfalls, some of the areas that we do have to give careful consideration to—perhaps the unfortunate consequences or unintended ramifications of this legislation.

I also want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for her contributions, as well as, of course, the Minister of Natural Resources.

I did want to touch on something very briefly that has rubbed me a little wrong about this conversation today. As I was sitting here thinking about one of the concerns of a lot of my constituents, hydro prices, and of course thinking about the need to ensure that we're conserving all of our environment to the best of our abilities—something, to me, that strikes a chord of cognitive dissonance in the government's actions comes down to the fact that Liberals seem to love coal. We see them selling Hydro One, investing \$6.7 billion in a coal plant, and yet they have the audacity to come here today to speak about the environment. I think it's important—

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's good to hear the Liberals changing their tone—

Interjection.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I think it's good to hear the Liberals changing their tone and starting to take the environment seriously for a change. I appreciate that, but I think that they have to recognize the cognitive dissonance between speaking about promoting environmentalism and, on the other hand, investing in coal. Something doesn't seem right.

I do want to commend conservation authorities across the province for the work that they've done in promoting sustainability for future generations. I think there's more we can all do in this House, and I encourage the government to take action on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to offer some thoughts on the remarks by the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka on Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. There were several things that he highlighted in his speech that I would love to talk about, but something in particular really struck me, and that was the issue he raised around the need for additional funding for conservation authorities to implement the increased responsibilities and the new mandate that is proposed in this legislation.

I think it is instructive for us all to remember that it was the Conservative government in 1996-97 that brought about a drastic reduction in funding for conservation authorities. In fact, it was in 1992, under an NDP government, that conservation authorities had their highest level of provincial funding: \$52.8 million. Under the Conservatives, we went down to \$8 million. And the level of funding that the Liberals have provided has remained relatively constant.

There is no question, Speaker, that there will be a need for additional funding to be provided to conservation authorities to implement the responsibilities that are envisioned in this bill, and we have heard nothing from this government about that additional funding.

We have all witnessed the impact of climate change and major flooding, as close as the community of Windsor. We know that updating flood maps is a major expense and it is a major undertaking. Significant funding will be required in order to do that to protect communities—not even communities that are located in flood plains, but communities across this province—from climate change and excessive flooding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka can reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thanks to the member from Nickel Belt, who brought up issues about Cartier in her riding; the Minister of Natural Resources, who did point out—and it's something I've heard from constituents and people around the province—that not all conservation authorities provide the same services, as an explanation for why the minister is taking on some new powers; the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook and, of course, the member from London West.

I would point out that the government has been in power some 14 years, so they've had plenty of time to fund conservation authorities. As I mentioned in my speech, they're currently funded—about 10% of the funding for conservation authorities comes from the province.

But there certainly are lots of questions I still have, and I hopefully will get a response to them, specifically:

- expanding the entry-without-warrant provisions in the Conservation Authorities Act;

- the minister giving herself the authority to create regulations regarding the qualifications for members of a conservation authority;

- why they're combining administration costs and maintenance costs under “operating expenses”;

- why they're taking the power to set fees away from the conservation authorities and giving it to the minister;

- why they're changing the way in which costs are allocated to municipalities within a conservation authority;

- why they're repealing the provision that states that only those ratepayers whose property is within a conservation authority should be taxed to support the activities of the conservation authority;

- and also, why they're moving the power to make regulations regarding lands owned by the authority from the conservation authority to the minister.

So, Mr. Speaker, lots of questions, and I look forward to receiving some answers as debate continues on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise as the member for London West to participate in the debate on Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. Before I begin my remarks, I understand that there has been unanimous consent for the NDP caucus to stand down our lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): No, as a matter of fact, you have to seek unanimous consent.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Oh, may I? I would like to seek unanimous consent for the NDP caucus to stand down our lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to stand down the lead speech of the New Democratic caucus on this bill. Agreed? Agreed.

The member for London West has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to begin my remarks by saying that this bill has been a long time coming. It was in 2003, when the Liberals were first elected, that we heard their first commitment to reform the OMB. So it's great that this legislation was introduced in those final days of the last spring session, and it's great that we're debating it now. But I think that there are real concerns about whether we will actually see a new planning system in place before the next election, and whether this bill is just being treated as some kind of a symbolic gesture to the people of Ontario because frankly,

Speaker, the Liberals could have moved on this issue long, long before now. They could have introduced reforms to amend the antiquated and out-of-date OMB process that has resulted in decisions of democratically elected municipal councils being overturned all across this province. They did not do so until today, but at least we see some proposed changes outlined in Bill 139.

1540

The major change in Bill 139 is to enact the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, which will result in local planning appeal tribunals replacing the current Ontario Municipal Board. So the Ontario Municipal Board Act is repealed, it is replaced by a new act and, effectively, the OMB continues as a local planning appeal tribunal.

The bill also establishes a new standard of review for appeals by the local planning appeal tribunal of official plans, official plan amendments, zoning bylaws and zoning bylaw amendments. Such appeals will now only be allowed to ensure consistency with provincial plans, conformity with provincial policy statements and conformity with applicable official plans. The new standard of review that is established by this bill does not apply to other appeals under the Planning Act, such as subdivision plan approvals, site plans, minor variances or consents and severances. So there are some limits to what can be appealed under the local planning appeal tribunals, but essentially the new tribunals will replace the old OMB.

Our big concern about this legislation, Speaker, is that, as we see with so many pieces of Liberal legislation, much of the substance of the bill is left up to regulation and ministerial direction, which is a big concern. When there is so much that is left to regulation, that is left to bureaucrats, that does not engage us as democratically elected representatives of our communities, it does not allow us to scrutinize what is being proposed. It also could potentially result in a long delay before these changes are actually implemented.

There is also a big question, I think, Speaker, about whether the changes that are set out in this bill can actually be enacted without a parallel update to the provincial policy statement, to reflect the new standard of review that is proposed in Bill 139. We know that updating the provincial policy statement is a very comprehensive and involved process that typically takes years.

So, Speaker, we are very concerned that although Bill 139 moves the needle forward a little bit, makes us feel that OMB reform is maybe finally coming, we cannot really know from this legislation what the new system will look like because, as I mentioned, so much of it is left to regulation. We cannot really know whether it will truly result in a more responsive, accessible, accountable, sustainable and effective land use planning and approval system.

There are a couple of provisions included in the bill that I wanted to spend some time on. The first is the changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, because that is the other main component of this bill: to amend the Conservation Authorities Act, which regulates Ontario's 39 conservation authorities. The bill clarifies that

these conservation authorities have an explicit purpose. Their purpose is to "provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario." Adding in this purpose, I think, is helpful because the current act does not include a definition of "purpose" for a conservation authority.

The bill also sets out provisions to improve public notification and participation in conservation authority proceedings. It requires public meetings, notification for communities about these public meetings, and mandatory disclosure of conservation authority bylaws, fee schedules and any memoranda of understanding.

The issue of fee schedules is a significant one. I know from an issue that I have raised numerous times in this Legislature that fees can have a significant impact on people's use of our natural amenities.

Komoka Provincial Park is not a conservation authority, but it is a wonderful natural asset that we have very close to my riding of London West. In 2016, the Liberal government arbitrarily imposed parking fees on the use of that park. Previously, that park had been open to any member of the surrounding neighbourhood, that community of southwestern Ontario—anywhere, in fact. Anyone could come to Komoka Provincial Park and take advantage of the trails that are there, the nature-viewing opportunities, the health benefits and the social activities when you have trail walkers all participating together in walking the trails.

The parking fees imposed have, I know anecdotally, really drastically reduced usage of this park. People have told me that they relied on using that park on a daily basis for their mental health and for their physical health. With these fees, they are no longer able to go to Komoka Provincial Park and continue to use the amenities there.

I have now collected 1,500 signatures from Londoners on a petition to remove those fees from the park. People are engaged when they hear about user fees that are imposed on conservation authorities and provincial parks because they view these as public goods, as public assets that should be available for every Ontarian to enjoy.

This bill allows conservation authorities to charge fees for programs that are within classes determined by the minister. Conservation authorities must publish a fee schedule and a fee policy that must be regularly reviewed. Any person can ask the conservation authority to reconsider a fee that was charged if they believe it was excessive or contrary to the fee schedule.

The other concern related to conservation authorities and Bill 139 is, of course, the additional funding requirements that will be needed for conservation authorities to carry out their increased responsibilities under this legislation. There has been no mention by the government of where these resources will be generated or how municipalities will be able to ensure that conservation authorities are delivering on this new mandate that is set out in the bill. Many people have identified this as potentially yet another unfunded mandate that is imposed upon

municipalities, because we know that it is through user fees and municipal funding that the huge bulk of funding for conservation authorities is generated. It's certainly not coming from the province. In my community, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority gets less than 3% of its base funding from the province. The rest of its funding is generated from user fees and municipalities. Speaker, this has been a problem since at least 1996 when, under the Conservative government, drastic cuts were made to funding for conservation authorities—drastic cuts. Over \$50 million was provided in funding in 1992, under the NDP government, to conservation authorities, and that was slashed to about \$8 million in 1996, under the Mike Harris Conservatives. The Liberals have maintained that very low level of funding relatively constant, but there is no question that Bill 139 will require additional resources.

1550

The other provision of the bill that I want to spend some time on is around the transition from the old OMB process to the new appeal process, going back to the first section of the bill. The bill currently allows the minister to decide whether appeals will be carried out under the old OMB process or the new Local Planning Appeal Tribunal process.

That is a big concern, Speaker, for my community of London. The city of London engaged in one of the most substantive and far-reaching consultation processes ever undertaken by any municipal government in this province when we developed our recent London plan. It's our official plan for the city. It envisions building the city up instead of out. It is explicitly designed to control sprawl and get better value for taxpayers by ensuring greater density and infill development. This official plan was unanimously endorsed by council. It got the approval of the province last December. But 42 appeals have been filed by developers against the London plan. These appeals have been referred to the OMB. However, the appeals are not likely to proceed to hearing until the middle of 2018. So London is in the unique situation of being the only municipality with an official plan that is currently before the OMB. However, we're caught in the transition period between the old process and the new process that's set out in Bill 139. This is a huge concern to the city because, as I mentioned, 14,000 Londoners participated in this plan, it has had great support from people within the community, and we don't want to see it derailed. We do not want to see it undercut by this panel of potentially a single expert who has no contextual background, no knowledge of the situation, ruling with the developers on these appeals.

That's why, during the AMO conference this August, representatives of the city of London met with the parliamentary secretary for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and set out our concerns about the transition process and put in the official request that since the minister is allowed to determine how the transition process will work, we want to make sure that the interests of the people of the city of London are reflected in those rules that the minister determines for transition.

The city, as I said, is the only municipality with a government-approved official plan that is currently awaiting a hearing, which has not yet commenced, before the OMB. The city is seeking to ensure that new rules that are brought in through Bill 139 include a transition process that allows for consideration of minister-approved official plans under the new, rather than the old, land use planning appeal regime.

I hope the parliamentary secretary, when he met with representatives from the city of London, listened carefully to the concerns that were raised. I hope that he has shared those concerns thoroughly with the minister, because as the deputy mayor has said, if the OMB sides with the developers who have brought the appeals forward, it would cut the heart out of the London plan. This is too important an initiative in city building, it is too comprehensive a process, to allow it to be lost because of the Liberals' foot-dragging, frankly, on reforming the OMB. This is something that should have been done long, long ago.

There are a couple of other issues that I wanted to very quickly comment on—things that were missing from the bill. One is around designation of heritage properties. This is an issue that is very important to my community in the city of London. This bill is silent on the designation of heritage properties under the Ontario Heritage Act. We would have liked to have seen some clarity about the ability of municipalities to protect heritage properties because we have seen, too often, the OMB overrule municipalities in their heritage preservation efforts by allowing developers to proceed with only facades instead of actual heritage conservation.

There is also no clarity about the role of the environmental appeal tribunal with respect to a planning issue with environmental significance. We know that many planning issues intersect with the business of the Environmental Review Tribunal, but the bill includes no direction about how these two entities are supposed to work together.

So there are a number of issues that the NDP will be bringing forward amendments on to address. I look forward to hearing the lead remarks from our critic for this issue because I know that he will have some very insightful comments on how the bill could be improved. We do, however, welcome this initiative, and look forward to strengthening the bill and ensuring that it really does improve the planning and appeal process in this province, and result in a much more responsive, accessible, accountable and democratic process in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: First of all, in response to the member from London West—before I go there, I just want to acknowledge people from Conservation Ontario that are here today. Two, three, four weeks ago—time goes flying—I had an opportunity, along with the minister, to meet at the beautiful Ganaraska centre in the great riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, along with

Conservation Ontario folks and people from the Ganaraska conservation authority, Quinte Conservation, and Trent, Otonabee and Durham. Speaker, I must say that I was quite surprised, actually, by their comments to the minister towards Bill 139 as to how it's long overdue and needed, and that they support the direction, in general, that the government was taking. Of course, we can always do better, so thank you for being there the other week. It was a pleasure.

1600

I think I'm speaking right after this for about 20 minutes, but on the transition piece that the member also alluded to: This is a conversation that we're having as the legislation goes through the proper process in the House, and while we're here debating—obviously the old rules still apply, but we're also very much aware that we'll try to deal with that process as we come close to passing the legislation, through regulations, because it's a piece of legislation, obviously, where there are things in progress that are moving down the line, and we certainly don't want to stall that progress when it comes to development issues in Ontario. So I would say that as we debate, we're also listening attentively to what we hear here, and also to what we hear from stakeholders, on how best to deal with the transition piece.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's indeed a pleasure to rise and to speak to the comments from the member from London West. Certainly we agree that there need to be changes. We need to reform the OMB. But we do have some concerns about the way the government is proposing to change the system. We want to see a system that respects the authority of municipalities and the input of local community groups, without adding additional delays and red tape for well-planned developments.

Speaker, I can look back in my time here and look at how the green energy bill was brought forward, and how they took municipal control away from them. We introduced legislation a number of times to try to get this stopped and try to put the control back in the municipalities' hands on wind farms. Unfortunately, it was always voted down by the government and certain members of the NDP when we brought these reforms forward. So we do have concerns about how the bill is structured, and that it will take some of this power or authority away from the municipalities.

In my riding of Perth–Wellington, I've heard concerns for years about just how much authority the municipalities are missing in some of this legislation. We're certainly concerned that it will lead to more cases going to court, making the process more expensive and less accessible to concerned groups and citizens. It's very expensive to go to court or to go to the OMB hearings, and that does stop people from going to these proceedings, because they just feel they don't have the money to do it. It's something that we do have a concern with.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Question and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm proud to rise and speak to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017.

Speaker, we all know the history of the OMB. Really, it was an arbitrary system where people would present their case, and it was an argument. There wasn't a way to find a place where people could present their case studies, so to speak, and actually come up with something that could be workable. So I hope that when we have this legislation in place, it's going to be something that both parties can use to work towards a solution, a conclusion where they can walk away and at least say that they got something accomplished.

In the old system, Speaker, it was mostly of course the developers who got the prize at the end of the day. Generally, they are the ones who have deep pockets and could argue and take these arguments far, far along to the OMB, where they would win, so people were not happy. We know that in the NDP, Rosario Marchese talked about the OMB all the time, and how slanted it was and how unbalanced it was. This is somewhat, I think, what people are looking for—some answer. I don't know if it's the whole solution to their issues.

I think time will tell with the legislation that the Liberals bring, because oftentimes it doesn't practically work. The ideas might be good, but then when it comes down to practicality, it doesn't actually implement what people are expecting.

Honestly, I hope that this is something that is going to solve some of those combative issues when it comes to planning, and that people can have a voice, along with developers, making their case and coming to a place where they can find the right thing to do for the city that they live in.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: I'm pleased to rise, monsieur le Président, in support of le projet de loi 139. It's a great pleasure to be talking about this issue, because it's a very important issue all across Ontario and particularly, I think, in Ottawa–Vanier. We've had several issues about appeals to the OMB where citizens have expressed strong concerns.

I want to address some of the issues that have arisen, particularly on two issues: the need for participation of the local groups that want to be heard by the OMB, and ensuring indeed that municipal decisions are given the credibility and the deference that they deserve. This is exactly the point of this bill, which is to provide, at the same time, the authority for municipal decisions to be respected and fully complied with.

I would point out that there are some provisions, as you will read a little bit more fully, for mediation to occur. I think the questions that were raised by the member from London–Fanshawe—I think there is ability there.

The second point that I want to address that was raised is about schedule 2 of the bill that does create a centre to

help community groups participate. I think schedule 2 is a great innovation, to have a centre that is independent from government and whose sole purpose is to support groups that want to intervene and be heard in front of the new tribunal. I think this will alleviate some of the concerns that were raised about the inability, sometimes, of local people to express themselves fully in planning decisions.

This bill aims to strengthen our ability to plan for the future, and I think we know that is important for all citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to thank the member for Northumberland–Quinte West, the member for Perth–Wellington, the member for London–Fanshawe and the member for Ottawa–Vanier for their remarks on my remarks.

I would have hoped for a little bit stronger response from the member from Northumberland–Quinte West about the concern I raised on transition from the old OMB process to the new local planning appeal tribunal process. It's very clear that this legislation gives the minister the broad authority to make regulations providing for transitional matters, including whether the new process or the old OMB Act will apply for matters or proceedings commenced before or after the new act comes into force.

My community is the only municipality in this province that currently has an official plan before the OMB. We want an assurance from the government that our official plan, a plan that was developed through a very extensive consultation process that involved the input of more than 14,000 Londoners—we want an assurance that that plan will not be arbitrarily overruled by an unelected, undemocratic, arbitrary OMB panel, and that the 42 appeals that have currently been made of that plan will be heard through a much more fair and transparent process.

So I ask the government, I ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to listen carefully to what the city of London officials have asked for.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on Bill 139, An Act to enact the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, 2017 and the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre Act, 2017 and to amend the Planning Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and various other Acts.

It's a great personal honour for me to speak on this bill. I know my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs has spoken already on this bill, along with the Minister of Natural Resources. I've had a great opportunity to work with both of them very closely, as the Attorney General, on this particular bill, especially as it relates to the new planning appeal tribunal and the new

planning appeal tribunal support centre that are being created as a result of this important bill. I will speak to that in a moment.

Through this bill, we are building a more accessible, faster and less adversarial process for appealing land use planning decisions. I must say that this is particularly momentous moment for me, not only because reforming the Ontario Municipal Board, or the OMB, was a major component of my mandate letter from the Premier—along with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs—but also because it's a promise that I made to my community of Ottawa Centre. Since 2010 I have been working very closely with various community associations in my community, such as the Hintonburg Community Association, the Wellington Village Community Association, the Westboro Community Association, the Glebe Community Association and many more, in finding ways to practically and meaningfully reform our land use planning system and the Ontario Municipal Board so that they are more reflective of the communities that we serve. In fact, Speaker, many, many ideas that we find in this bill are things that our communities have championed together. It's quite gratifying to see that this kind of change, which will really, truly transform our land use planning system, is taking place by way of Bill 139.

I had the great honour of introducing this bill when we announced it last spring, alongside Mayor Jim Watson, who is very supportive of this bill. Many members of the communities that I just mentioned, from my community of Ottawa Centre, were present and expressed their delight and support for this bill.

We listened to the people of Ontario. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs has mentioned, during our consultation period we heard from thousands of Ontarians. The message we heard was clear: The land use planning appeal system is not working for people or for our communities. Today, I am pleased to rise to talk about our government's proposed legislation that would, if passed, transform Ontario's land use planning appeal system, including replacing the Ontario Municipal Board with the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

Our reforms centre around four pillars:

(1) creating greater predictability for residents, communities and developers by sheltering certain major planning decisions from appeal;

(2) giving greater deference to the decisions of local communities while ensuring that development and growth occurs in a way that is good for Ontario and its future;

(3) ensuring faster, fairer and more affordable land use planning appeals; and

(4) providing access to free legal and planning support for Ontarians.

With your permission, Speaker, I will spend a little bit of time on each of those four elements of this bill, which will go to the heart of how we are transforming the land use planning system in the province.

Our province is growing at a rapid pace. In fact, Toronto and other municipalities in the greater Toronto

area are home to some of the largest and fastest-growing populations in the entire country. Speaker, you may be surprised to learn that, over the next 25 years, our population is expected to increase by more than four million people. To support this growth, we must ensure that we build healthy, sustainable and safe communities.

But communities that provide a high quality of life don't just happen; they are carefully thought out and developed so they can support the needs of current and future residents. Strong communities take careful planning and careful development, and we all know how much work goes into development of official plans. There's a massive amount of consultation with the community, developers, resident groups and elected officials—and I'm sure a lot of us, in our respective capacities as MPPs, have participated in those meetings. So it only makes sense that our appeals process supports those plans by giving communities and developers more predictability. That's why the proposed measures to transform Ontario's land use planning appeals system include exempting a broader range of major land use planning decisions from appeal, including new official plans, major official plan updates and detailed plans to support growth in major transit areas. These exemptions will help provide greater predictability in the planning system and will go a long way in helping developers and communities prepare to build stronger and more prosperous municipalities.

Speaker, we all know that no matter the level of planning, there will always be many different ideas on the best way to develop an area. That's the nature of the communities we live in. There are many different views on how to best accommodate growth. There are a lot of different factors to consider and a lot of different opinions. To help ensure that the voices of local communities in particular are heard, the proposed legislation would require that the tribunal give greater weight to the decisions of local communities. That is one of the core tenets of Bill 139. This would be achieved by eliminating lengthy and costly hearings for the majority of planning appeals and ensuring that some matters could only be appealed on the grounds that they don't conform to or are not consistent with provincial and municipal plans and policies. What this means is that the new tribunal could only overturn the municipal decision if it does not follow provincial and local plans or policies. If the tribunal finds that the municipality's decision does not conform to an official plan—this is a very important point—then the matter is sent back to the municipality for reconsideration, which will help keep planning decisions local.

Speaker, I know that you are aware, because your region, Halton, is one of the regions that have advocated for these exact changes in terms of deference to local planning. I know that in my meetings with them—especially at the AMO meetings just this past August in Ottawa—they were quite supportive of Bill 139, for exactly these reasons that the changes have been made.

Taken together, the changes to exempt some planning decisions from the appeal process, coupled with our

proposal to give greater weight to decisions made by local communities—we feel we have struck the right balance between supporting development while also protecting local interests. What we're doing is really giving deference to our local decision-makers, our local city councils and municipalities, who have all the evidence available to them to make the right decision, as long as it conforms or is consistent with the planning documents, like the official plans, the Planning Act, the provincial policy statement. If they do so, the decision stays. If they fail to do so and it's determined by the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, then they get to reconsider the matter.

Speaker, I would now like to take the opportunity to talk a little bit about the changes we're proposing to the hearing process in the tribunal. My ministry, the Ministry of the Attorney General, was quite instrumental in working with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs on those particular pieces, to see how we can modernize the appeal system, how we can build on the way the system works in the OMB and create an appeal system that is faster and fairer, that is responsive to the communities and really goes to the heart of the issues, as opposed to having what's referred to as *de novo* hearings—hearings from the beginning—which many communities and municipalities found frustrating. These changes, these reforms, go to the heart of that.

We know, Speaker, how time-consuming the appeal process can be. If given the choice to go through a lengthy hearing or to have an opportunity to settle some or all of the issues without a hearing at all, I'm sure that most people in our province would choose the latter.

Under the new tribunal, we will be requiring parties in major land use planning appeals to participate in a mandatory case management meeting to discuss opportunities for settlement and identify and narrow the scope of the appeal.

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This case management meeting would be a new mandatory first step that would require parties to meet prior to a hearing, which would allow opportunities to discuss settlement options, including mediation, which could ultimately avoid the hearing process altogether. This, in my opinion—and I'm sure many would agree—is a far better option.

We're also taking a number of steps to make the appeals process more efficient; for example, by establishing clear timelines for the hearing processes so that people can get a better sense of when the tribunal would hear their case and how long the whole process is going to take.

Our proposed changes would not only result in more effective hearings but would also support a cultural shift to a less adversarial system. For example, we are proposing to get rid of lengthy and often confrontational examinations and cross-examinations of witnesses by parties and their lawyers at most major hearings. Instead, we will clarify the new tribunal's power to effectively guide the hearing by examining parties, witnesses and

anyone else who appears before the tribunal. The tribunal would also have the power to ensure hearings are fair by requiring parties to produce evidence or witnesses, where appropriate.

Speaker, I am confident that these changes will go a long way in making the appeals system far more effective and efficient, and, as a result, the appeal system will be far more accessible to everyday Ontarians. In essence, what we're really doing is transforming the Ontario Municipal Board by replacing it with a Local Planning Appeal Tribunal—truly an appeals tribunal, a tribunal that is focused on the record at hand that was produced by the planning department and considered by the local municipality, and then to see whether or not, based on all of the evidence before it and the planning rules that are in place, the municipality respected those rules. Again, if the answer is no, then the matter is referred back to the community for the municipalities to consider.

Finally, Speaker, I would like to talk about how we are helping citizens to access the appeal process through the proposed creation of a new Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. This is an important point in this legislation, because I know that in my community and all across Ontario, people want a say in how their communities grow and they want to be sure that local perspectives are taken into account when decisions are made. Our government, Speaker, couldn't agree more. We appreciate that people don't always agree with local land use planning decisions that affect them, and we have heard the concern that people do not have access to information about the appeal process and planning or legal advice. I am sure we all have stories of attending those planning meetings and we all have heard from our various community associations how much effort and resources it takes. We have all probably been to those bake sales where community associations sell muffins and other baked goods to raise money so they can participate in an OMB appeal.

All those are taxing. These are our neighbours; these are our friends who live next door from us and who put in their time and effort and resources to fight these cases, and there does not seem to be the kind of help necessary at times, especially to those communities who may not have the right set of resources to then navigate through the system.

That's why we are proposing changes that will empower and support people who want to participate in the appeal process. This will be done by establishing a new independent agency called the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. This centre will help ensure that the views of local communities are taken into account when major decisions are made by providing free legal and planning advice to Ontarians throughout the appeal process, including representation in certain cases. The centre will help Ontarians understand and participate more effectively in the appeal process by providing general information about land use planning to residents, offering guidance to residents on the tribunal process, and providing legal and planning advice at various stages

of the appeal process, which may include representation in some cases as well.

Land use planning directly impacts Ontario families, so it is critical that they feel supported in the decision-making process. That requires access to information. As such, we are proposing to build a new, revamped, user-friendly tribunal website. Once an appeal process is complete, tribunal decisions will be posted for all to see. That includes new summaries of decisions that would be explained in plain language. The new website would also make it easier for the public to access information in different formats, such as videos.

I have no doubt that these changes will make it a lot easier for residents to better understand how to participate in planning how their communities grow.

This is, again, a comment you hear often: that the system is too complex, that the system is designed for experts, be it in planning or law, to navigate through, and that there is not sufficient information available, even in researching case law, to better understand how the Planning Act, a provincial policy statement or an official plan is interpreted. Making that information more accessible through the website, in plain language, will allow our communities to be far more active participants in the process.

I am confident that these proposed changes would be successful in bringing effective change to the appeals process within the land use planning system.

I'm sure that many will recognize the following famous quote from Jane Jacobs. She said, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

Mr. James J. Bradley: Jane was right.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I couldn't agree more: Jane Jacobs was right.

These are changes that, to me, continue to help represent the interests of developers while also helping to give residents a real voice when it comes to land use planning decisions. Most importantly, these changes will help ensure that the cities and towns reflect the best interests of the people living in them today, as well as for future generations.

In my view, the impact of these changes is that we are going to make better decisions in the beginning of the process, as opposed to relying on an OMB process.

The way the system is designed right now is that people, depending on whose interest is at stake, rely on the OMB process, to see that the OMB will get it right, as opposed to working hard from the beginning of the process, from the moment a developer becomes a proponent of a development, engaging and consulting with the communities, making sure the neighbours are engaged, for the municipalities and their planning departments to do the same process, to take into account communities' interests, to take into account what developers are proposing, to see if everybody can come together, and then, in effect, focusing on what the official plan or the zoning bylaw provides for.

These changes also incentivize municipalities to keep their official plans and zoning bylaws more up to date. That is the key. We need to make sure that these very important fundamental documents remain up to date in conformity with the provincial policy statement and the Planning Act, because then it allows for certainty and predictability both for the developers and for the communities. It allows for better decision-making as opposed to trying to correct that later on through the OMB process.

We also understand there are always going to be disputes. Not in every instance will everybody agree. So let's make sure that we create an appeal system to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal that really is focused on reviewing the decision and making sure the decision conforms to or is consistent with these important official documents, as opposed to a body that imposes its decision as to what it thinks is the right set of developments.

The best decisions are made at the local level, because the local analysis is there through the planning department and, of course, through our municipal leaders, who are elected and are accountable to the constituents.

In total, I firmly believe, and I've heard from my community in Ottawa Centre, that these are very important changes. This is really transforming the land use planning system in the province of Ontario in the right direction. My community very much supports these changes.

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One of the questions that I constantly heard during the summer months was, "When is this bill being asked back to the House?"—I'm glad we brought it back the very first day—and "When is it going to become law?"

So, Speaker, I urge, on behalf of my community, that members support this important bill and pass it into law as soon as possible.

Le Président suppléant (M. Shafiq Qaadri): Je voudrais remercier notre procureur général pour ses remarques, et maintenant je passe la parole au député de Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. Vous avez deux minutes.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to add another couple of minutes to debate and raise a concern that we've raised many times regarding this legislation, Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017. In addition to reforming the OMB, this bill contains significant changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. Instead of giving these acts stand-alone attention, the government is bunching legislation together—and quite a few pieces of legislation; I think about 20 acts all together.

The point I wanted to get on the record is a concern that, as I said, we've raised regarding red tape for development. We all know here that we have a shortage of rental housing in Ontario, due in part to red tape and delays in the planning process, yet this bill further lengthens planning timelines. These additional costs will be passed on to new renters and homeowners. Timelines for making decisions related to official plans and zoning bylaws would be extended by 30 days. For official plans,

the timeline would be extended to 210 days, and for zoning bylaws, the timeline would be extended to 150 days.

Speaker, the government says that they want to cut red tape in housing, but at every opportunity, we continue to see more delays, more red tape getting in the way of new supply getting onto the market. Last year, we put forward an amendment to restore a number of planning timelines to what they were back in 2004, but this government decided to vote them down, despite many industry experts actually supporting that amendment. So I would like to bring that forward for debate today.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I want to thank the honourable member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for further questions and comments. I now turn to the MPP for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to weigh in on Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017. I'm going to just keep my comments at this point to the OMB piece. Clearly, this bill is still missing some big pieces. I think what municipalities and what people were looking for were less appeals, not more stages of appeals. I know that the taxpayers want their municipal dollars spent on services, not on lawyers at the OMB. It can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars every time a municipality ends up going to the Ontario Municipal Board, money that should be spent on local services for people.

The city of Welland, for example, is currently appealing development charges that have been passed at the region of Niagara. They are appealing those development charges as being way too high to promote housing development and other development in our city. They're going to be at the OMB spending tax dollars, and the OMB is going to be spending more dollars that could be better used for local services. We need housing and we need development growth, and Ontario hasn't removed the barriers that need to be removed to assist in building more affordable housing in this province. We shouldn't expect to avoid paying a reasonable and fair share of costs of growth-related infrastructure or avoid planning rules to limit the sprawl that developers are still wanting to do in municipalities across this entire province.

The bill also ignores the inclusionary zoning piece, I believe, a proposal that we tabled again and again, and which I think was part of a Ministry of Housing bill a while ago, in the last round, but I don't think that this bill actually addresses that either.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the honourable member from Welland. I now turn to the member from St. Catharines: two minutes.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I was very encouraged, Mr. Speaker, by the words of the Attorney General, with some, I think, very significant reforms taking place in the planning process. I was particularly pleased that he mentioned the assistance that would be provided to the average citizen who wants to participate in the planning process. In the past, it was seen that well-financed developers were able to hire the best lawyers and, before

we changed the act, were able to engage, in some cases, in intimidation of those who were opposed using SLAPP suits, as they were called. We did pass legislation which changed that.

But the very fact that people are going to be assisted, provided with information and even in some cases representation, providing them with some clarity, a website using plain language—all of these things are designed to help the average citizen to participate in hearings because often they felt that they were overwhelmed by the experts hired with the endless bank accounts of those who were in the development industry and that they didn't have a chance. As a result, we saw some decisions that local people were not happy with.

On the other hand, I think we have to be cautious in that there ultimately needs to be some appeal process available, because it could be that some local councils somewhere in the province might be unduly influenced by those in the development industry. The local folks would want a chance to be able to deal with those local decisions because a local council could say, "Look, it's a local decision. We took local input, and therefore the decision should stand." We understand it. I think what the minister has tried to do, successfully, is to bring about balance.

I will have further comments about the conservation authorities when I get a chance later on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the honourable member from St. Catharines. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to provide some comment in regard to the Attorney General's words that he shared.

Of course, we all support greater transparency, accountability and clarity in any legislation. That's the whole idea of what our legislation should be. But we're certainly hearing that there's still lots of confusion. We asked questions about the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. We asked some things like how the centre will operate, who will be able to access the services, how the services will be financed, where the centres will be located, will there be limits on how many individuals or groups can access the services each year and who the support centre reports to, and yet, with most of those, when we were going through, they didn't answer them conclusively, so we're concerned about those types of things when we're talking about clarity and transparency.

We've heard from many groups that are suggesting parts of the legislation are not clear. Municipalities, in fact, are still unsure of what impact these changes will have. Again, we are going to raise those. That's part of committee and part of the debate. The OMB has been in place as a name since 1906. Most people understand that. It's pretty clear and simplistic. We're going to change the name to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, and yet there's also a local appeal body. So for the average person on the street, are they really getting a clear version of what this legislation is going to do by a name change or is it going to muddy the waters?

I'm going to talk for 20 minutes at much more length, but one of the biggest things, again—and I believe the member from St. Catharines just talked about local accountability and local autonomy, yet this government wants to propose that they can come in and tell you who you are going to put on a board when they only pay 10% of the freight. That simply is wrong. We saw that with the Green Energy Act, where they usurped local authorities. It hasn't worked. It still continues not to work and yet here's another new piece of legislation that they're bringing in. They're going to say, "We are going to take control and appoint who we want on your local board despite us only bringing 10 cents on the dollar to the table."

I'm going to have lots more to say about this bill very shortly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the honourable member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I now return to the Attorney General, who has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the members from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Welland, St. Catharines and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for their comments on the remarks that I made.

I want to say, and I think the member from Welland raised this point and I agree with her point, that we want less appeals, we want less dispute. So if we can design a better system that will allow for better decision-making up front, I think communities are better off, and that's exactly the intent of this legislation. Of course, we're open to ideas on how to improve that; that's always the case with any legislation.

But the idea here, Speaker, as I said in my comments earlier, is to create a better decision at the local level, at the municipal level, through proper consultations with the communities so that you have a win-win situation, so you don't have too many appeals.

Now, we don't live in a perfect world and will always need some sort of an appeal or tribunal mechanism if there is discord or conflict. That's why we're significantly transforming how the OMB works, and that's why we felt that changing the name is important: so that it truly reflects what this new appeal tribunal will do. It will be a quasi-judicial tribunal that is responsible for hearing appeals as a reviewing body, not as a body to replace the decisions of the local municipal council—what the OMB does, and which is the biggest criticism that we've heard from our communities and from our municipalities.

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Both the Minister of Municipal Affairs and I had the opportunity to present on these changes at AMO in Ottawa in August. There was widespread support for the changes we brought in because we worked very closely with our partners in AMO and various communities to better understand the changes they need.

I feel very strongly that we are moving in the right direction and that, if passed, this legislation will truly, meaningfully transform the land planning appeal system in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to start off my remarks by acknowledging, as many have already today, the attendance of Dick Hibma, who is chair of Conservation Ontario as well as chair of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority. Not only do I want to thank Dick for all of his time, energy and passion into this subject, but also his wife, Sandra, and family, because I know the amount of time he spends away from home on this very particular subject. I want to extend a thank you to all of you for what you've done for our province.

We also have Sonya Skinner, CEO of Conservation Ontario. Thank you very much for what you do—sorry, Kim Gavine. Sorry. I've got two introductions here.

Recently I met with Dick Hibma—again, the chair of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority—and Sonya Skinner, the CEO of that organization, as well as Wayne Brohman, the CEO of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, both of them in my great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I just want to acknowledge them and the efforts that they make to keep me informed and up to speed on issues of importance to conservation authorities.

As I suggested in my two-minute reply a few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, we are fully supportive of greater transparency, accountability, allowing the public to have their say and better awareness of what's happening in the area of planning. We certainly support the government on those initiatives to move forward. What I'm also suggesting—and as we are here to provide opposition; that is our job. It is our role to bring challenges and concerns that we don't feel have been thoroughly communicated or at least addressed so far with this type of legislation, and that's what I'm going to do in my 20 minutes today.

We have a number of areas that I'm going to talk about, but I'm going to start off with the one that I think is paramount, and that I started to talk about in my two-minute reply: the minister taking a position that they have the ability to actually challenge the qualifications of conservation authority board members. These are appointed at the local level, where the bulk of the funds to operate our conservation authorities are derived from. If you're going to have local say and you're going to have to pay, then you should have the ability to appoint those. In my mind, it has worked very well. I'm not certain we've ever gone back and really qualified the qualifications of people running for municipal council. You can kind of elect anybody you want in a public election, and that's what democracy is all about. That's the way it should be. Now we're going to go back and say, "But you can't appoint that person to a board," despite the local municipality paying the bulk of the fees. We're very concerned about that.

I am very concerned as a taxpayer that, again, the provincial government comes along and continues—I'm not certain exactly how many years, but it's a significant number of years that there has been no increased funding for conservation authorities by the provincial govern-

ment, and yet they want to keep decreeing that you shall do this and you shall administer this and you shall be responsible. At the end of the day, I think most people would suggest that if you want more say, then you'd better bring more pay to the table. I hear that across all of the conservation authorities that I've dealt with. They're very concerned. Obviously, they do a great job. It's a very responsible capacity that they take on in making sure that we have those available in our local communities.

I talked earlier very quickly about the Green Energy Act. This Liberal government came in and usurped the Municipal Act and stripped out the powers. Dutton Dunwich: My colleague from Elgin-Middlesex-London has had that situation where 80% of the people from Dutton Dunwich did not want wind turbines in their backyard, and yet the government overruled and said, "We shall put them there," and denied a neighbouring community that actually said, "We do want them," with no contact to the local community, no contact to the local, democratically elected officials.

I see a very similar thing that could be happening here, where they want to come in and actually have way more say. They want to decree what they believe is going to happen and yet bring a very piddly 10% to the table from those fees.

I know in our discussion, certainly we talked about the increasing demand and the increasing responsibility, and yet not any more money than they've had, I'm going to say, for at least 10, 12 or 15 years, probably. My understanding from this government is there haven't been any significant increases, and yet they waste billions of dollars.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: I know they're going to try to challenge me, as they already are, but at the end of the day they have to look in the mirror and know that they're wasting billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, on things like gas plant scandals, things like eHealth, things like Ornge ambulance. And yet here's a conservation authority. They are responsible for protecting our environment, our planning, our communities, and yet they've got no increases. But they can waste billions of dollars.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: They're free to heckle me all they want. They have to go home and talk to their constituents and look in the mirror. I am okay with that.

Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned. As I said earlier, we are concerned about the number of questions that are still out there. Yes, some municipalities are saying this isn't a bad thing. They're making some improvements. We're moving forward in some areas, and that's good. We certainly want to support the things that are positive and that are going to be of benefit to our communities.

But when they can't answer such basic things as, "How will the centre operate?"—this is the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre that I'm referring to. "Who will be able to access the services? How will the services be financed? Where will the centres be located?"

Will there be limits on how many individuals or groups can access the services each year? Who does the support centre report to?" When they can't answer those explicitly in black and white, Mr. Speaker, it's very challenging.

We've heard from many groups. Parts of this legislation are not clear, and municipalities are unsure of the impact. Yes, they are supportive, and I think on the general scale of the high-level stuff, they are saying, "Yes, we agree there's a need for change. We want that local autonomy. We want that ability." Yet it's always in the details. I've certainly found in my six years, Mr. Speaker, that that is a challenge.

Whenever I hear them saying, "It's going to be in the detail of the regulations," that makes me worried, because then we, as the people democratically elected to set the rules of our great province, lose control of what's going to be there, and the governing party of the day basically assumes total control and can write into those regulations whatever they want. We want to make sure that we're not falling into that type of thing.

We've heard from community groups. There are some concerns that removing oral testimony and cross-examinations will make it more difficult for community groups to challenge opinions and raise their concerns.

Red tape: We've heard in this House on many, many occasions that we already have a shortage of rental housing in Ontario due, in part, to red tape and delays in the planning process. Yet there are concerns that this bill will actually further lengthen planning timelines. These additional costs will be passed on to new renters and homeowners. That's just the reality. If someone has the ability to make money in 10 months and you extend it out to 12 or 14, someone has to pay the freight for that. This is one of those situations where that could happen again.

Last year, we put forward an amendment to restore a number of planning timelines to what they were in 2004, but the government voted it down despite the fact that an industry expert said: "These are the type of amendments that would help facilitate bringing supply to the market more expediently and putting some more tension in the planning system to get discussions and negotiations moving more quickly."

Mr. Speaker, numerous groups have raised concerns that these changes will lead to more cases going to court, making the process more expensive and less accessible to concerned groups and citizens. Again, that's not what we are hearing from the public—from my perspective, we want to find ways to put people to work, to allow them to work, so there's more money in the economy for all of the great things we need.

As I said earlier, I'm concerned. The Attorney General has tried to indicate, and I somewhat understand what he's saying, that he's heard that this could be a new—but when you have something that was created in 1906, everybody, in my mind even people who don't really pay attention to politics, can pretty much understand what the OMB means. So rather than getting caught up in the semantics of a name change for the organization, let's

look at the legislation. Let's look at what's truly going to impact and not going to impact. My fear would be that you're going to create more confusion. It could be inadvertent, certainly, but at the end of the day, if that's the situation, then I'm very concerned.

As I referenced earlier, the member from St. Catharines talked a little bit about giving local authorities the ability to do their job. Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned, as I said earlier, about the Green Energy Act. We saw this game once before. The government said, "We know better. We are going to enforce this. We are going to steamroll over top of local planning authority." And when they have portions of the legislation that give the minister the right to set regulations regarding things like qualifications and who can sit, that makes me very leery. We need to ensure that it's in the local municipality's best interest, and typically what I find is that the people locally understand their community the best.

It really raises a question: Does this Liberal government not trust the municipalities to appoint the right people? Are they standing up and suggesting that they know better than the local people who have lived in that community all of their lives—those people who have actually stepped up and said, "I want to serve in a volunteer capacity on these boards," who are locally elected, democratically elected officials, who have given their time, energy and public service for the betterment of their community? And yet, they're challenging them and saying, "You're not necessarily the person we think is best to sit on that board." Mr. Speaker, I really, really struggle with that.

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It allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations regarding the programs and services that conservation authorities will be required to provide. Each conservation authority and watershed is different. We all understand that. We all, I believe, should appreciate that. So why are we trying to apply a cookie-cutter approach and requiring all to provide the same programs and services? I believe that if you're giving truly local autonomy—you go back to that board and you set some parameters, but you allow them the ability to make the choice of what's best for their community, what's needed in their community, as opposed to a government in Toronto saying, "This is what you shall do in your area."

Mr. Speaker, it certainly is a concern for me and it's a concern for many people I have met with that this government, again, has taken a lot of directions and it has not benefited the province of Ontario. Our health care, I believe, is not in a case where it's better than it was 10 or 14 years ago. Certainly, our long-term care, which I am the critic for now, is not in a better place than it was a number of years ago. Things like our school closures and our education system, despite what the government tries to suggest to you—is not in a better situation than it was 10 or 14 years ago, when they came to power and started to put their stamp on our great province. They've definitely eroded a lot of the trust. They've eroded a lot of the belief in our communities that they are there for

the reasons that are best and are going to better our communities for the people they serve. It has become much more, "This is what we want to do under our tenure. You just listen. We know better, and we'll continue going down there."

Mr. Speaker, I've talked about it a couple of times now, and I'm going to go a little bit more again in regard to—conservation authorities have had a set budget for many, many years, but the Liberal government of today continues to add decrees of "You shall" and "You are mandated" and "You will do this," but no more resources. I don't think it's fair to those conservation authorities to continue to be expected to add to the responsibility, to the demand, with no more resources.

At the end of the day, all of us understand, if you're going to give me more work, if you're going to give me more responsibility and expectations, there have to be some resources brought along to the table to help me fulfill those obligations.

So I'm very concerned that a government that puts 10% of the actual cost of operating and running our conservation authorities can come in and suggest to you, "You shall do this. You will be decreed by us to do this with no more resources"—and at 10%. If they were paying 90%, maybe it would be okay for them to come in and decree that they're going to do the bulk of this. But when you're bringing 10% to the table, and what's really following back—I believe we have a very limited amount of money that is actually going—about 10% of revenue comes from the province, 54% from the municipalities—again, a taxation. So if these new decrees require more resources from the conservation authority, what are they doing? They're going back to the taxpayer.

There's only one taxpayer, as you well know, Mr. Speaker, having served this great province for over 25 years—and we thank you for your time and dedication.

One per cent is from the federal government, and 35% is self-generated. So, again, the onus goes back to fundraising. It goes back onto volunteers, and it goes back onto those communities to support something that they may not always agree that they even want in their own backyard—because, again, they're not necessarily listening to the local community and giving them the ability to define what their needs and expectations are.

So I really want to make sure that the government listens to that. I hope that they're not just going to gloss over and say again, "We know better than you."

I'm just going to make one quick point here. I know one of my esteemed colleagues across the aisle, in one of his replies, talked about—and this is the member from Northumberland–Quinte West, who I think responded to my great colleague here from Niagara West–Glanbrook in regard to—he was blaming Mike Harris for the funding of conservation authorities. Mr. Speaker, they've been in power for 14 years.

You can't continually just look in the rear-view mirror and not take responsibility. Why have you, as your government—if you believe so strongly in the environment, if you believe so strongly in conservation, why

have you not increased the budget? Why have you wasted so much money and put no increased money into conservation, particularly our conservation authorities?

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to allow him to sit there and ponder that a little bit while I finish the few minutes I have remaining.

The waste, the scandal, the billions of dollars—just think of what we could have in our watersheds. Just think of what we could do in regard to our planning and the increasing vitality and sustainability of our communities if we actually had the money that they wasted on gas plants, on eHealth, on Ornge.

Mr. Speaker, it's unfathomable that this government—
Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: You will note that I'm getting a lot more thought process coming out from them. I think it's a bit of guilt showing through now.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's fake news, man.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's not fake news. You tell me that you didn't waste billions of dollars, and we'll have that discussion any day.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize. I have to ask the House to come to order. The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is duly participating in the debate. He's got the floor.

I return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

You can always tell when you're starting to hit the nerve, because it really gets loud on that side. They start to squirm a little bit and say, "Oh, my goodness. I may actually have to go in front of my people, in June of next year, and I'm going to have to stand up and say, 'I did the best for you. I wasted billions of dollars. You can't get a hospital bed. You can't get a long-term-care bed. We've closed schools on you. But we've done better.'"

Let's get back to conservation.

I want them to be able to answer to Conservation Ontario on why there has been no increased money for 14 years, despite saying publicly, "We're all about conservation."

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: So I can tell, again, I'm getting close to that nerve centre. That's okay. Part of my job is to challenge them, to hold them to account for the things that they choose to do.

We want to ensure we have conservation authorities and other such public sector organizations that are doing the job locally, that are doing the planning we require to have sustainable, vibrant communities of the future. We want progressive growth. We want to ensure that at the end of the day, we have the local autonomy to make the decisions that are best.

As I said earlier, each of our conservation authorities is slightly different. We have different challenges, we have different variables, and we need to have the ability for those local communities, and those people that truly step up to serve their communities, to have the same.

Again, I want to acknowledge, certainly, in my backyard, that we had some feedback from Wayne Brohman of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority. He shared this with the government:

The Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority “is comprised of 15 municipally appointed authority members. At its authority meeting on July 18, 2017, the authority members instructed me, as general manager/secretary-treasurer” of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, “to submit a comment with respect to part IV of the amended act, Membership and Governance. Authority members suggest that local municipalities should have control over the composition and terms of the appointed members. Given the familiarity with local issues and needs, and further given that, in the case” of Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, “the watershed municipalities provide 10 times more funding to the authority than does the province, municipalities should be entrusted with deciding who their member representatives should be and what term they should serve, rather than that being the subject of provincial regulation.”

Again, I reiterate the reality of what we’ve seen under this government with the Green Energy Act. They came in and totally overrode—they steamrolled—local governing ability. Locally, democratically elected officials have no say in whether things such as industrial wind turbines are in their backyard. They believe that “we should just be able to do that because we know better than you.” You have to give trust to the people, especially the people that are committing the time and energy that they do, like Mr. Hibma, who has been in his organization for many, many years.

It was interesting. About a year and a half ago, there was talk of a very similar type of thing from a planning perspective. NEC expansion meetings created total public confusion, a lot of angst, a lot of challenge, certainly in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. They were going to suggest that they wanted to add 45,000 hectares under the NEC jurisdiction, and yet no one in their whole bureaucracy was really, truly able to articulate what the betterment and the improvements would be to our communities and to our province.

I do give the minister of the day credit, because she did listen. A number of us brought our arguments very strongly to them, saying, “Please stop and think about what you’re doing. Do not just continue down the road with blinders on and do this.” I do give that minister credit. I hope that the two ministers—one of them is the same this time—will listen to the feedback that we’re bringing.

That is what the whole idea truly is in regard to public consultation. We’ve gone out and listened. Now we are here to debate this bill, and we want to make sure that the amendments that we have suggested are in place.

In recap, I really want to make sure that the government is not going to take that—I don’t want them to actually overlook.

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I want them to give trust to that local person who is democratically elected. The conservation authorities have

run successfully for many, many years; they have done a great job of stewarding our resources and our province and moving our communities forward with local people. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, I believe that if we allow them the control and the ability to do their job with local input, with local decisions defining why we move forward, hopefully the government will stop wasting so much money—billions and billions that they’ve wasted—and put some additional money into things like conservation authorities going forward. They can challenge me on spending. Spend it where it’s strategically wise. Do it when it’s an investment that’s actually going to provide better opportunities for our youth, for the next generation, for the people who truly have paid the freight today.

Mr. Speaker, it’s been an absolute pleasure to speak to this bill, to bring forward some of those concerns, which is our job as the Queen’s loyal opposition. Our job is to challenge the government, to question them if they don’t have all the answers and to ensure that when they do legislation, it is clear, it is transparent, it’s clearly articulated for all stakeholders to understand and abide by. At the end of the day we want legislation that is going to improve our communities. In this case, to the conservation authorities of the past: Thank you so much for what you have done; best of continued success in the future. Thank you to all of those members who serve our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I only have two minutes. I could probably talk about this for an hour. I had the privilege to be on the Hamilton Conservation Authority for many years and sat also, with the city of Stoney Creek, on planning acts and such.

I have not been a big fan of the OMB over the years because some of the decisions have been too much—it takes too long to make decisions; people get upset; appeals take too long. Anything that streamlines that system, I am happy with—those changes. Certainly, you can go a little further on some of the changes, but I must caution the government and I also caution the member from the opposition side that local decisions are important and the people that live in the community know their community and the conservation authority knows their areas very well and do an excellent job. But I also would caution you that: Don’t forget you have people sitting on council—some of them may be large landowners in the area; some of them may be developers; some of them may be real estate agents. You don’t know—and the conflict of interest has not been dealt with to my liking in this bill, because it can crop up.

Some of the smaller communities in areas that are small have small councils, and some of them on those councils may own a good portion of the county that they are making decisions on. Is it also beneficial to them or is it beneficial to the people they represent? So be careful what you wish for. I personally would not have any government as the third party involved in this. I would

have a tribunal that was a separate entity that was almost like a trust decision-maker who have no connection to any community who would make the decisions for the conservation authority, for the local municipalities and for the planning act, and then they would have a ruling that would be—how would I say?—non-biased. Whenever there is a finger in there that can be controlled from Queen's Park or locally from some people that may or may not be involved, it could question the whole process. So be careful, people. Be very careful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you for the two minutes to respond to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I listened with great interest to what he had to say. I wanted to touch base on a couple of things. One was how members are appointed to the boards. This has been a subject of great discussion amongst members here and certainly amongst some of the members here that have received letters, like myself, as the minister, on the subject of who is appointed to the boards of conservation authorities.

Not all appointees have, perhaps, gone about their business the way that the constituents that elected them would like to see. In order to ensure that we have members that are on the boards that are being elected by the constituents, then we need to ensure that that process goes forward. Again, I do receive quite a few letters in the mail and in email about issues with that. It's time, after 20 years of not updating this, to at least look at the governance model.

Certainly with the funding methods and the models that we have in place, the province does continue to support the core mandate, which is water hazard management control and erosion. Certainly we are open to looking at other funding models if indeed we discover through this process that there are other core mandates that are going to be assigned to the conservation authorities. But right now, certainly, most of the funding does come from the single- or the second-tier municipalities; the province continues to support them.

It's interesting. I'm hoping that the member opposite decides—in the past, after the MNR budget was stripped in the 1990s, the members opposite have voted against those funding increases that we have had contained in the budget. So I'm hoping that in future they will support any budget increase—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As with the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, I'll limit my comments to the conservation authorities. Down our way, I feel we are fortunate that we have three organizations: the Long Point Region Conservation Authority, the Grand River Conservation Authority, and a small area in the east is covered by the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. There is so much value added that I've always thought was important, beyond flood control.

Norfolk is heavily forested, and there is a significant amount of logging to augment some of the shortfalls in

revenue. It's a great model. It's a model based on the Tennessee Valley Authority. The Tennessee Valley Authority may be the only other model that does follow a watershed.

Later this week I hope to be part of a Long Point watershed tour. We'll be touring some of the dams in the area, the mill pond dams. These are some of the problems that conservation authorities have inherited.

We get feedback from some of the authorities, and the proposal to establish education criteria for board members does not go over very well. I think of firefighters. That was an issue a few years ago, where volunteer firefighters were required to have certain educational attainments. You've got a firefighter—maybe he's a roofer; he builds barns, and he's not afraid of heights. He can't be a firefighter, because of educational criteria. We have so many conservation authority members who have that practical experience—maybe they work in the bush or they run farms. I don't think educational criteria is actually really that important for membership on a conservation authority.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always interesting to listen to the member from—

Mr. Bill Walker: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. John Vanthof: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, the man who can put more words into a minute than anyone else I know. He brought up some interesting points.

First of all, I'd like to say that I come from a part of the province where—we don't have conservation authorities in the north, but we do deal with the same issues. And now, with our climate changing, I think conservation authorities play an even more important role. I ran a farm for a lot of years, and individuals look at climate change and look at wetlands and look at flood basins differently than someone who is looking at the big picture.

We see that now with what's happening in Houston. Some of that could have been prevented if they had done better planning at the start. Could it have been totally prevented? No, but some of it could have been prevented with better planning. That's why, the better the procedures we can put forward, it's our duty to do that.

One thing I would like to bring attention to is regarding public notice for meetings. On page 38 in the bill it says:

"The body or bodies that call a meeting under subsection (1) shall ensure that, at least 14 days...,

"(a) published in a newspaper having general circulation in each participating municipality, including in the electronic version of the newspaper where available."

I agree with this, and the government should do this with everything. In small-town rural Ontario, particularly in northern Ontario, we don't even have Internet access, and most government notices are done on websites only. Perhaps you should follow your own advice: Put them in the Temiskaming Speaker, put them in the Tribune and

actually do what you're telling others to do. The best way to lead is by example, and on this one you could do that.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound can now reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: First and foremost, to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek: He raised issues about the OMB, and certainly we've all heard of issues where the OMB has had some challenges and struggles. I want to quote an Owen Sound lawyer, Erroll Treslan, who is often before the OMB. He commented on the coming changes as “a fine decision to give a little bit more deference to the local municipalities, people who elect their councillors, so people will have a say as to what development goes on in their community.”

Again, it reflects what I was saying. You want that local ability, you want those people there. You don't want the provincial government meddling and saying, “We shall appoint,” and taking control of these types of things

I'm pleased to hear the MNR minister stand up and provide a reply. I'm hopeful, when she talks about funding models, that she will be one of those people who tries to put a stop to all the waste of money they've had over their many years in government. She brought up the MNR budget, so I'm hopeful.

Right now, there are dam infrastructures that have deficit realities they have ignored for many, many years. I am hopeful, Minister, that you'll be able to fight your way through to find money, because these conservation authorities—you're saying, “You shall replace this. You shall do this,” but you don't bring any money to the table for them to do all that. It's very similar with our bridges and roads, the amount of money that has been wasted by this government, and yet our infrastructure is crumbling around us.

My colleagues from Haldimand–Norfolk and Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about flood control planning, logging, those types of things, and the actual planning and resources to have to ensure that our environment is stewarded properly in the future. I am hopeful that this government—they all seemed to like to scream and yell at me when I talked about them not doing the right things for these institutions—that they will actually, in the 2018-19 budget, put some money in there to allow for things like the dam infrastructure deficits that they've continued to perpetuate and ignore; that they will actually step up to the plate and address those and hopefully they'll carry along to a lot of other things like our bridges, our roads and all of our public institutions like schools and hospitals so we have a better province going forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's a pleasure to rise and have 20 minutes or so to speak about this bill. I am going to narrow my comments just around the conservation piece of this bill. I welcome Conservation Ontario here today.

I'm very happy to see that there is a purpose clause finally in the Conservation Authorities Act. It's very clear that it is to “provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources and watersheds in Ontario,” and there is no mention of balancing that with development, with private development. So that is a good piece to have.

I am concerned, though, about the section in Bill 139 which clarifies the conservation authority procedures with respect to giving more flexibility in managing their affairs, including procedures with respect to enlarging their jurisdiction, amalgamating, dissolving, amalgamation requiring ministerial approval, and public notification of meetings to discuss amalgamation or dissolution. I preface this not by painting all conservation authorities in the province, all 36 of them, with the same brush, but when you have a rogue conservation authority, which I have in my riding, particularly since the last municipal election in 2014, with a very right-wing agenda, you worry about giving every conservation authority more flexibility, although I'm sure many of them are deserving of it.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. It serves half a million people in Niagara, encompassing the entire Niagara region, and portions of Hamilton and Haldimand. That board actually has a member from Haldimand, a couple of members appointed from Hamilton, and the rest are from the Niagara Peninsula. The vast majority of them are elected regional politicians.

The Niagara Peninsula is one of the most complex watersheds in Ontario, managing over 2,870 hectares of some of the most sensitive and unique natural areas in the region, all of which is held in a public trust, and it includes areas drained by the Niagara River, Twenty Mile Creek, the Welland River, the Welland Canal, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

The legislative mandate of the conservation authority, as set out in the act that we have seen here, is not what we're seeing in the Niagara Peninsula. The NPCA has been under a lot of controversy over the last three years. I think most of it started with the restructuring under a new board of governors, where about 15—I think it was 25%—of the employees were let go at that time.

Mr. James J. Bradley: The environmentalists.

Ms. Cindy Forster: The environmentalists were let go; you're right. These people didn't have a union at the time, so it was just: “Here's your package. Goodbye. See you around”—some of them with 20 or 25 years' experience. What has happened is, that has kind of continued to happen. These people eventually joined OPSEU and they got a collective agreement. But their life hasn't been made any easier since then, except that they now have a voice and the right to file a grievance and do those kinds of things.

Then, the piece that really brought some controversy was the Thundering Waters in Niagara Falls, a huge property which is mostly wetlands. Two years ago,

China-based GR Investment company bought 196 hectares of land west of Marineland and adjacent to the Thundering Waters Golf Club in Niagara Falls. A billion-dollar development is proposed in Niagara which could be used as a provincial pilot for biodiversity offsetting. This is when the MNR gets involved. Even the Premier got involved. While she was on her trip to China, she witnessed the signature of the mayor of Niagara Falls to try and promote this project in one of the last pieces of Carolinian forest and wetlands in the Niagara area.

A lot of environmentalists became concerned, and this kind of came to the forefront. There has been lobbying done of the provincial government. I'm glad the minister is actually here today because we've sent letters to Minister McGarry, and we sent letters to Minister Mauro before that. The regional chair and other members of the NPCA were involved in trying to make this one of the first biodiversity-offsetting projects here in the Niagara region. But the problem with that is that most of it is wetlands. The vast majority of it is either wetlands or buffer lands. So, although in principle it sounded like a good idea, stakeholders in the community have thought otherwise.

I was in Thundering Waters a couple of weeks ago, and it is an amazing place. It's bordered by a subdivision and a bit of an industrial area. It was 85 degrees that day—hot, humid—and when you walked 20 feet into this forest, it was 15 degrees cooler. You know what? There are lots of brownfields in Niagara to develop; we don't have to be developing major projects on the last of our protected lands. The tour was led by a young man named Owen Bjorgan. He gave us quite an education; he'd done a lot of research about this. It's just one hour south of here. Of the 484 acres, 330 are provincially significant wetlands.

It seems to me that although we're getting these letters from MNR about how this project doesn't meet the requirements that would be needed to develop this, we're not vocally hearing this stuff. Although we've heard from the NPCA that they agree, that they're going to follow the mandate and do all those kinds of things, this is still rolling along with people lobbying to try to get this project forward.

That's only one of the problems within the NPCA. As I say, it is a conservation authority that has "gone rogue." And those are not my words; those are actually the words of some conservation authority members that I've talked to outside of the Niagara region. The NPCA's mission is to balance the interests of the environment along with development. The interests of municipal and regional councils often differ from conservation authorities, because they're worried about raising some more taxes to try and offset tax increases and to improve their services, whereas a conservation authority should actually be looking after protecting wetlands and protecting the environment.

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There has been this whole issue that has come up with the NPCA where private members of the public are being

sued for sharing their information—SLAPP suits: Ed Smith, a retired, respected military guy, who spent his entire career in the military; and two regional councillors, who shared information through an email to other regional councillors to ensure that they got the information—they're also being sued by somebody. There are a number of lawsuits going on. Even I was threatened with being sued by a company that had ties to Mr. Petrowski, a regional councillor from St. Catharines who had maybe worked for this company. I was threatened with a suit if I didn't, basically, shut up about this company.

Other issues that have come up with the NPCA: We had two sitting board members—when Minister McGarry talks about perhaps having some authority, or at least set some criteria for what board members should bring to the table at conservation authorities, I don't necessarily disagree with her. We had two sitting board members who took leaves of absence, and one of them actually was let a contract with the NPCA, and then both of them ended up with top jobs at the NPCA while they were sitting board members. David Barrick, a regional councillor who was also a board member at the NPCA, ended up with a very senior position at the NPCA, which he hadn't even applied for. He'd applied for another one and wasn't qualified for it, so they just gave him the other job that was available—jobs of people that they had terminated a few months before. The other board member, Carmen D'Angelo, took a leave of absence and then became the CAO of the NPCA, and then, later, the right wing of the regional government promoted him to the CAO of the region of Niagara.

So you can see where this story is going. Bill Hodgson, who is a regional councillor, was the former mayor of Lincoln. You will know him. Bill Hodgson was on the NPCA board. He was the only person who was questioning the decisions—or one of the few that was questioning the decisions; I correct myself. He had a smear campaign against him, and eventually he resigned from that board.

They talked about not lobbying on the biodiversity offsetting, but I've just come across a letter from a law firm who said that they actually were working for the NPCA, along with the region of Niagara, to actually try and get this billion-dollar project back on the rails, at the expense of—

Mr. James J. Bradley: What about the land deal in Wainfleet?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Well, there was a land deal in Wainfleet that was very early on, where I think that the taxpayers of Wainfleet and the taxpayers of Niagara paid way more than they should have had to pay for—

Mr. Paul Miller: A local decision?

Ms. Cindy Forster: A local decision, yes.

So this continues to go on. I've asked the minister, I've asked the MNR, I've asked the Auditor General, I've asked the Ombudsman and I've asked the Environmental Commissioner to weigh in on this. I've asked Minister McGarry to appoint a supervisor, because this stuff continues to happen.

The latest was the survey about workplace harassment. OPSEU conducted a survey of its employees, and 86.5% of the employees surveyed—the vast majority of them completed the survey. It was a very well-accepted survey out of OHCOW, the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers. The survey was done, and 86.5% of the workers surveyed said that they have been verbally harassed in the workplace, that they can't sleep at night when they go home, that they don't want to come to work.

The NPCA, with their new CAO—who was just hired in the last couple of months—have said, “Oh, my, this can't be true.” They refused to set up a joint committee to work with the people in this workplace, and they're saying, “We're going to do our own survey. We are a wonderful organization. We do nothing wrong. We provide great service for our tax dollars in the region of Niagara, and you all must not be telling the truth.”

Just yesterday, I get an email—if I can find it here, somewhere. This must be it right here. I have permission to read this to you. It says:

“Hello Cindy,

“My name is Jocelyn Baker; I am a former NPCA employee. I want to thank you for your tireless efforts towards NPCA accountability.” That's what we have been doing, folks: trying to get transparency and accountability going. “I admire your professionalism and class; you have been a joy to watch. I have been waiting for my gut to tell me it's time to speak out. Now is the time. I have no tolerance for harassment, incivility or disrespect. The NPCA, as you are keenly aware, is in crisis. The culture of harassment and violence continues, most recently verified through an OPSEU survey which I am confident you are aware of. NPCA front-line staff and middle managers continue to work in unsafe and dangerous conditions. This will continue until Ms. McGarry steps in and stops it. She has the authority; she just needs the gumption. I wrote to her as well.

“While working at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, I personally experienced and supervised employees who regularly experienced workplace violence, harassment (sexual, gender and family status), unwanted comment, conduct, and behaviour including bullying. All of this behaviour by members of senior management. I have been the complainant for three workplace harassment complaints, have been the key witness in two workplace investigations by Filion Wakely Thorup Angeletti LLP. The results of these investigations saw over 96 allegations of violence and harassment whereby 90% were found to be substantiated by fact. I experienced job loss threats, having a case of substantiated reprisal. I have spent thousands of dollars on legal fees and have been fighting to ensure a better workplace culture and environment at the NPCA. Despite all these efforts, my internal fight ended on November 21, 2016, after 23 years of dedicated, expert service.

“Harassment and violence at the NPCA is real. I have experienced it; it is continuing. Evil is only perpetuated by those who do nothing.

“I would be honoured to meet with you and your staff if you think I could be of assistance in your call for accountability” and transparency.

Here we are, three years later, soon to be going into the fourth year, and this all continues to happen.

So, what have we done so far? I brought forward a private member's bill—it passed second reading here in the House—that would at least see that 50% of board members have some sort of environmental background, some sort of experience, some sort of interest. Even the mayor of Welland proposed that the appointment process, where we have two-tier government, go back to the local municipality so that at least the local municipality could appoint, as opposed to the large regional municipality having all the authority to appoint their friends on council.

We called for a supervisory position to oversee the board. We spoke at every council in Niagara. We had the support of all party MPPs to call upon the Auditor General to go in and to do an audit, and not just an audit of finances.

This is a place where contracts were given out that didn't even follow their own policy. So when you talk about wanting to give conservation authorities more flexibility, that isn't going to help with our situation in Niagara. One of the board members got a contract, and other people were let contracts where the policy said “\$25,000” and it had to go out to tender, and all they did was split it up into two different years and pay them \$25,000 this year and \$25,000 next year. There are a lot of problems.

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I think we had support from every municipality in Niagara to have an audit done; here we are, almost a year later, and we don't have an audit done. We've had no review of the NPCA, and that certainly is problematic. That's why I'm using my time today on this bill, because somebody has to do something. Conservation Ontario has no direct oversight over these kinds of issues, and MNR says, “Well, we don't have any authority,” so what is a community to do?

We have thousands of people who have signed petitions. You have a town hall meeting on this issue in Niagara, and you can get out a lot of people to come and talk about how pro-development the NPCA is, as opposed to dealing with what their mandate is really supposed to be about, which is protecting the environment and our wetlands. In closing, I think that I will once again call upon the minister to get involved in this process.

Just before my time runs out: On Friday, two more top people at the NPCA were terminated. One was a manager of planning who had been there for many years; the other was a senior staff member who actually became the acting CAO until they hired the most recent person. Of course it says “mutually resigned,” but we all know what “mutually resigned” means. It means that you left, you got a package and you signed a confidentiality agreement. I would say now that 50% of the NPCA staff has turned over in the last three years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: I want to commend the member on an outstanding speech here in the House this afternoon. She has pointed out some complaints that all of us have heard about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. She mentioned questionable contracts that were let; controversial land deals that have taken place; cronyism and unconventional hiring practices; environmental people sent packing and replaced by more development-friendly people in staffing; workplace harassment; and the need for an audit.

But what has happened—she pointed this out—is that whenever anybody is critical of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, they get threatened and bullied. That includes the member for Welland, who has been threatened and bullied publicly and privately because of the stand that she has taken.

She mentioned Bill Hodgson, a regional councillor from Lincoln. You won't find a more decent individual than Bill Hodgson. He dared speak out. What happens? They bullied him until he resigned from it. Then you had Mayor Dave Augustyn of Pelham, who dared to be critical. What happened to him? They had a Tory from Niagara-on-the-Lake, a well-known developer and money man for the Tories in Niagara-on-the-Lake, sicced on the mayor of Welland, as well as some others, criticizing him for what is happening in Welland in terms of municipal decisions being made. You had the member herself, as I mentioned. You had Ed Smith, who is a private citizen out there who really has no stake in this except to be a good private citizen, who dared to question what was happening and got sued for it. Then you had two regional councillors who got sued.

Anybody who tries to take on the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority gets bullied, as the member mentions. I'm glad that she was able to reveal this to members of this House, and we hope that this matter can be dealt with appropriately. This legislation goes part of the way to doing so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I do want to thank the member for St. Catharines for his words on the NPCA situation and, of course, the member for Welland for the good work that she has done on this.

In the couple of minutes, although it's not directly relevant to the bill, I do think it's very important that we have a debate on this, because there have been definite concerns that have been brought forward about hiring practices, about accountability and transparency at the NPCA. I thank the member for Welland for the good work she's done on that.

I do want to point out to the member from St. Catharines that I think we do have to be careful about politicizing this as a Tory-versus-Liberal or a Tory-versus-NDP situation. I have called on it as well in the NPCA. I think this is an issue that impacts all Ontarians, whether or not you are part of a political party in a

traditional sense, and I just want to make sure we're not politicizing it too much.

But I agree with the members that this legislation does do some good in moving forward on that issue, on addressing these sorts of accountability concerns, and that they are aware we need that oversight from the province as well. I commend, again, the member for speaking to this, because it's something that has gone on for quite a long time, where there are concerns, whether that's in hiring practices or whether that's in termination practices as well. I think it's definitely necessary to keep bringing that to the attention of the Legislature in the hopes that either the Auditor General or else will have an independent audit. In fact, I believe the NPCA, under pressure, has accepted to allow the Auditor General to come in, if I am correct. They haven't actually asked her to come in yet, I believe, unfortunately. Hopefully, we'll see action on that. But I think it's due to the incredible representation like that of the member from Welland that they have felt that pressure. Hopefully, we can keep that up in a united front and not on partisan lines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member for Welland. Certainly, they are insightful comments from the former mayor of Welland. Thank you. I would like to thank her also for verifying some of my concerns in my short two-minute application.

What's missing in this bill? I can name a few other things that are missing in this bill.

No clarity about the role of the Environmental Review Tribunal with respect to planning issues with environmental significance.

Many of these provisions will come into effect only upon proclamation, leaving open the possibility that some may not come into effect at all.

The actual impact of many of these provisions will depend on regulations, leaving open the possibility that they may fall short of what is being promised.

No planning support for smaller northern or rural communities that lack the capacity to make planning decisions that could have irreversible impacts on their environment—small communities that don't even have a council.

No significant changes for heritage properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

The increased CA authority will require additional funding, which seems to be missing. Where is the money coming from? And 10% doesn't quite cut it.

Bill 139 includes gaping loopholes with respect to aggregate extraction, allowing for pits and quarries with huge impacts on waterways, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas within a CA's area of jurisdiction.

No planning support. Also, the OMB reforms only apply to specific planning decisions. It does not apply to the OMB appeals concerning other municipal businesses, like development charges, aggregate permits, municipal ward boundaries, charges, etc., which all play a factor in

the decisions that the conservation authorities make on a regular basis.

The people who sit on the conservation authorities are sometimes local municipal councillors, sometimes appointees by the public, and in 99% of the cases there is no bias. They are making decisions on what is good for their territories. I hope that that can continue, but certainly there are some loopholes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to offer some remarks this afternoon in response to the comments made for the member from Welland. This is going to give me the opportunity to share with her and other members of this House some insights on the Grand River Conservation Authority that is in my region, the community of Waterloo region, which I hope she will appreciate.

You will know this, Speaker, because this goes through your riding, too, of Wellington–Halton Hills. Some 39 communities are part of this watershed; close to one million people are on the Grand River watershed. It is the largest watershed in southern Ontario. The Grand starts in Dufferin county in the north, it goes through my region of Waterloo, and it empties out into the south, in Lake Erie.

It is—did you know this?—the oldest water management agency in Canada and it is one of the oldest in the world. Some of the areas of responsibility of the GRCA include managing the watershed of 6,800 kilometres, managing floods, keeping the river flowing in dry weather, and managing over 90 species of fish and over 250 species of birds. They also manage municipal water systems and dams and reservoirs, and they offer a fantastic lineup of outdoor activities: world-class fishing, camping, canoeing, swimming, geocaching, hiking and bird watching.

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Speaker, you can see that the Grand River and the surrounding land are a very valued and vital resource in our community and require very careful management. The conserving watersheds act will give the provincial conservation authorities a modern framework from which to carry out their very important work. So I would encourage the member from Welland and everyone else in this House to support this piece of legislation, to support Bill 139 when it comes up. I know that I will be doing so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. I return to the member for Welland for her reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I would like to thank the members from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Kitchener Centre, Niagara West–Glanbrook and St. Catharines for their comments. I know I gave you a lot of information to digest in a very short period of time. We could probably go on and talk about this for hours. I want to once again say that I am not painting all conservation authorities with the same brush, and I am in no way anti-development, but development needs to happen in the right

places and the right spaces without impacting our environment, and clearly the NPCA has been actively pursuing biodiversity offsetting for this large piece of land in Niagara Falls.

I want to just spend the last minute imploring the minister. Listen, we have appointed supervisors at hospitals in this province, we have appointed supervisors at school boards, most recently in the city of Toronto. I think the minister has the power to appoint a supervisor to come in. If she doesn't, she should do it anyway. Something has to be done about this situation, particularly when it is impacting the health of many workers in this province. Perhaps the Minister of Labour can appoint a supervisor to go in if the MNR doesn't. But we need some help down here, and all parties are asking you to assist. Certainly, there are thousands of members of the public who want some assistance. Something needs to be done because nothing changes. It just continues to get worse. When you have a brand new CAO saying that there's nothing wrong with this agency, that everything is wonderful, in spite of the last three years of documentation and controversy around it, I think it cries out for some assistance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I guess you and I are going to end the day. Before I get to my comments, I just want to acknowledge the consultation process, which was fairly intense—and I'll talk about that more later on. I certainly thank the minister and his staff for all their support and, from my office, Travis Hoover, who I think came to every public consultation that I was able to attend.

My remarks are going to focus more around the OMB reform, being parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs—no offence to my friends from the conservation authority, but I think you heard a lot of conservation stuff today. My remarks are going to focus more on the municipal affairs piece.

I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak about the progressive reform the government is proposing to the Ontario land use planning appeals process in Bill 139. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Minister Mauro cut his political teeth as a municipal councillor in Thunder Bay, and I entered political life as a councillor in Brighton, where I eventually served as mayor. We both became members of the provincial Parliament in 2003. I'm gratified to serve as Minister Mauro's parliamentary assistant for municipal affairs. It is a privilege to work to build safe and strong urban and rural communities with dynamic local economies, abundant green space and a quality of life that is second to none.

With Bill 139, we have heard clear support for reforming Ontario's land use planning appeal system. The proposed Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act will bring about needed reform. This government, in Bill 73, Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, and in other measures, laid the foundation for comprehensive OMB reform. Bill 139, before the House today, builds upon the steady efforts this government has made over time.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, I received a mandate from Minister Mauro to take a leadership role in the consultations on the review of the Ontario Municipal Board. As you know, this review was conducted jointly by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of the Attorney General, which has oversight of Environment and Land Tribunals Ontario, and under it, the Ontario Municipal Board. My own role was to ensure that the voices of Ontario's communities and stakeholders would be heard as we considered the OMB's scope and effectiveness.

In my community of Northumberland-Quinte West, land use planning affects almost every aspect of life, as it does in every community across this great province. It helps communities decide whether and how to grow; where to build homes, parks, schools and roads; how to protect their natural resources; and how to meet community growth and development needs today and tomorrow. It was a great privilege for me to support the consultation process for this review.

The minister reported to this House today the high level of engagement that the government witnessed in consulting on this review. This underscores the high importance Ontario communities and stakeholders place on effective reform of the Ontario Municipal Board.

We received more than 1,100 written submissions, and more than 700 people attended 12 town hall meetings held across this province. Across the board, we heard support for improving the Ontario Municipal Board. This bill reflects what we heard in a careful and balanced way, and at the same time is an ambitious bill. The minister has outlined for the House today how Bill 139 will transform the land use planning appeal process in this province.

Mr. Speaker, through my long involvement in many community organizations, I have had the opportunity to learn about laying foundations and building on them. Just as in building a house, one needs a strong foundation. That's why I want to spend a few moments talking about what this government has already done to improve the land use planning appeal system in Ontario.

This government, working closely with communities and other stakeholders, has already made many noteworthy changes to the Planning Act relating to the OMB. The list of changes we have already made is significant.

This government has provided an ability to eliminate appeals to the OMB of municipal refusals of applications relating to urban boundary expansions, giving municipalities more power to set out where they will and will not grow.

This government has reinstated the minister's authority to declare a provincial interest in matters before the board, ensuring that provincial policies are upheld, as they must be.

This government has limited appeals rights for employment land conversions, helping municipal governments to build communities where people can live and work in complete communities that support all stages of life.

This government has also eliminated appeal rights for residential second unit policies, which will help with our housing efforts, giving Ontario communities the power to increase housing options for their residents and giving homeowners an attractive path to affordability.

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As I've said, this government's changes to the Planning Act are already significant and substantive and make for a very long list. They limit who can appeal a land use planning decision to those who raised their concerns during the municipal decision-making process in the first place. This change ensures that applications provide municipalities with full information at the start of the land use planning process rather than introducing it during an appeal. This measure helps participants in the planning process avoid an OMB hearing. Just as importantly, this government has given the OMB an important power: the ability to dismiss repeat applications without holding a full hearing.

As Minister Mauro has noted before, we made it possible for municipalities to establish local appeal bodies for some matters in 2007. Let me say clearly before this House that, if this bill is passed by the members, Ontario will continue to have a provincial land use planning appeal tribunal, and the local appeal bodies already permitted under the Planning Act and the City of Toronto Act will retain the ability to hear appeals on certain local matters. I mention this because some have asked if the proposed bill will altogether eliminate a provincial body responsible for hearing land use planning appeals. I want to assure the members of this House and the people of Ontario that this is not the intent of the bill at all, nor is this proposed in the bill before the House. But Bill 139 does propose to create what will be called the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, which will replace the OMB. The tribunal will be a provincial body that hears appeals across the province on local planning decisions, but the tribunal will have different powers than the OMB has today.

So what are we doing to build on the strong foundation this government has already set down? What new reforms are proposed and, more importantly, what are the effects of the proposed reforms?

Bill 139, if passed, will give Ontario residents the tools they need to participate effectively in appeal hearings at the tribunal by establishing the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. This centre will advise Ontario residents before and during the hearing process. Participants in the OMB review said that they needed the support, and Bill 139 will deliver it. The bill will turn the tribunal into a true appellate body for major land use planning matters and make the process at the tribunal more efficient.

Bill 139, if passed, would also give more weight to local and provincial decisions, as the minister said in his remarks earlier on today. The government is proposing to accomplish this by amending the Planning Act so that major matters can only be appealed on the basis that they weren't aligned with provincial and municipal policies.

Bill 139, if passed, will also eliminate appeals of provincially approved municipal official plans and major updates. This will result in fewer municipal and provincial decisions being brought before the tribunal. The proposed act will also limit appeals of municipal interim control bylaws when first passed and limit amendments to new secondary, or neighbourhood-level, plans for two years.

Our bill, if passed, will enable municipalities to achieve density levels needed to support transit in official plans and zoning bylaws should they choose to exercise this discretionary tool.

The bill, if passed, will require mandatory case conferences for most Planning Act matters before cases can proceed to a hearing, which could result in cases being sent to mediation instead of a hearing. It could narrow the scope of the issue in dispute, making the appeals process more effective than it is today.

The bill proposes to shorten the appeals process by allowing the introduction of timelines for the proposed Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. As you know, a reduction in time would save all parties in costs.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, the reforms proposed in the bill will transform today's Ontario Municipal Board into a true appeal body for major land use planning decisions, with a hearing process that is less adversarial for users.

Our government listened carefully and closely during the consultation period, and we believe that this legislation, taken with our recent updates to the land use planning system, will introduce needed changes and address many of the concerns we've heard during the consultation.

Earlier, Minister Mauro talked about the growth that is happening in Ontario's communities in many forms: condominiums, stacked towns, row housing, single detached homes, commercial developments, industrial developments and many more. This is happening because our communities are definitely growing. The population of the greater Golden Horseshoe is expected to double by 2041. This growth is happening because we have a strong economy and vibrant communities that people want to live in.

We want to support the growth and manage it responsibly. We want to build neighbourhoods that work

for people, and we want to preserve the natural resources that help us thrive. That's why conservation authorities are so important and why modernizing their structure is one of the aims of this bill.

As you may know, last May we built on the provincial policy of 2014 by updating the land use plans for the greater Golden Horseshoe. Through that process, we added 10,000 additional hectares to the greenbelt and we raised the bar on our efforts to curb sprawl through the growth plan.

These provincial policies that encourage growth while protecting our water resources and our farmland would continue to guide the decisions of local planning appeal bodies if this bill is passed.

The tribunal will see fewer appeals, lightening the caseload, of course. It would have greater resources and it could have timelines for decisions. This will add up to an appeals process that moves faster, that could bring new housing and office space to market earlier, and that would support the kind of growth that people want to see.

All these changes—the 2014 provincial policy statement, the updated greenbelt and growth plans, and, if passed, a new local planning appeal body—will modernize our approach to land use planning in Ontario. Taken together, they would provide sustainable growth that is more responsive to the voices of our communities.

I believe we have brought forward a bill that furthers the goals and addresses many of the concerns we've heard. As the minister noted, the feedback we've heard on the bill as proposed has, overall, been very positive.

Having supported the review of the Ontario Municipal Board and considering the voices of the communities and the stakeholders in the consultation process, I remain committed to listening carefully to all voices during the deliberation over this bill.

Speaker, I see you looking at the clock attentively, so I'm going to stop there before I finish, and hopefully I'll have the opportunity to conclude at a later time. Thank you for the opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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